

POST STORIES

VOLUME TWO

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THE SATURDAY EVENING
POST
STORIES

VOLUME TWO

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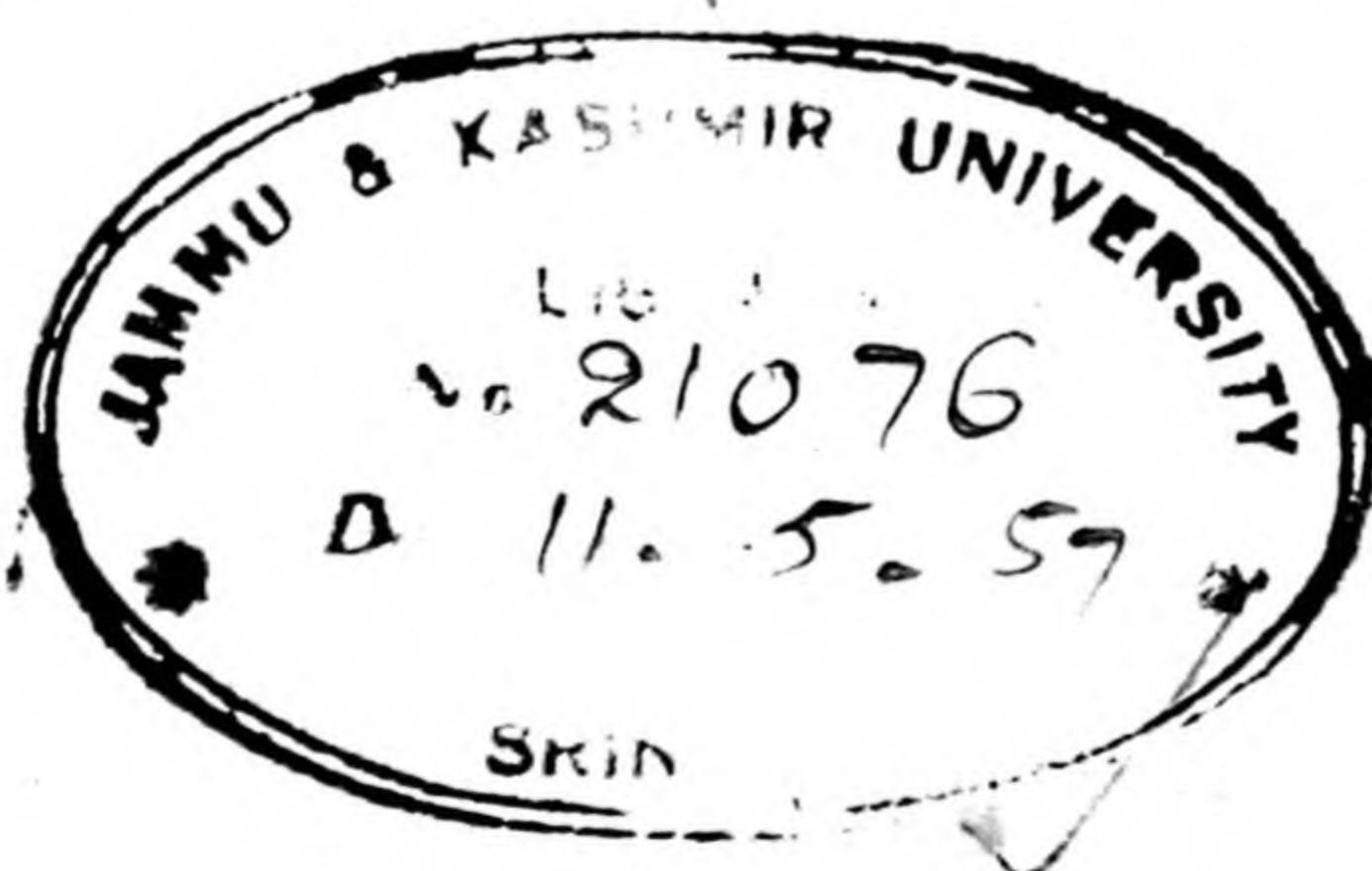


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VOLUME TWO

RACE AT MORNING

By WILLIAM FAULKNER

I was in the boat when I seen him. It was jest dust-dark; I had jest fed the horses and clumb back down the bank to the boat and shoved off to cross back to camp when I seen him, about half a quarter up the river, swimming; jest his head above the water, and it no more than a dot in that light. But I could see that rocking chair he toted on it and I knowed it was him, going right back to that canebrake in the fork of the bayou where he lived all year until the day before the season opened, like the game wardens had give him a calendar, when he would clear out and disappear, nobody knowed where, until the day after the season closed. But here he was, coming back a day ahead of time, like maybe he had got mixed up and was using last year's calendar by mistake. Which was jest too bad for him, because me and Mister Ernest would be setting on the horse right over him when the sun rose tomorrow morning.

So I told Mister Ernest and we et supper and fed the dogs, and then I holp Mister Ernest in the poker game, standing behind his chair until about ten o'clock, when Roth Edmonds said, "Why don't you go to bed, boy?"

"Or if you're going to set up," Willy Legate said, "why don't you take a spelling book to set up over? . . . He knows every

cuss word in the dictionary, every poker hand in the deck and every whisky label in the distillery, but he can't even write his name. . . . Can you?" he says to me.

"I don't need to write my name down," I said. "I can remember in my mind who I am."

"You're twelve years old," Walter Ewell said. "Man to man now, how many days in your life did you ever spend in school?"

"He ain't got time to go to school," Willy Legate said. "What's the use in going to school from September to middle of November, when he'll have to quit then to come in here and do Ernest's hearing for him? And what's the use in going back to school in January, when in jest eleven months it will be November fifteenth again and he'll have to start all over telling Ernest which way the dogs went?"

"Well, stop looking into my hand, anyway," Roth Edmonds said.

"What's that? What's that?" Mister Ernest said. He wore his listening button in his ear all the time, but he never brought the battery to camp with him because the cord would bound to get snagged ever time we run through a thicket.

"Willy says for me to go to bed!" I hollered.

"Don't you never call nobody 'mister'?" Willy said.

"I call Mister Ernest 'mister,'" I said.

"All right," Mister Ernest said. "Go to bed then. I don't need you."

"That ain't no lie," Willy said. "Deaf or no deaf, he can hear a fifty-dollar raise if you don't even move your lips."

So I went to bed, and after a while Mister Ernest come in and I wanted to tell him again how big them horns looked even half a quarter away in the river. Only I would 'a' had to holler, and the only time Mister Ernest agreed he couldn't hear was when we would be setting on Dan, waiting for me to point which way the dogs was going. So we jest laid down, and it wasn't no time Simon was beating the bottom of the dishpan with the spoon, hollering, "Raise up and get your four-o'clock coffee!" and I crossed the river in the dark this time, with the lantern, and fed

Dan and Roth Edmondziz horse. It was going to be a fine day, cold and bright; even in the dark I could see the white frost on the leaves and bushes—jest exactly the kind of day that big old son of a gun laying up there in that brake would like to run.

Then we et, and set the stand-holder across for Uncle Ike McCaslin to put them on the stands where he thought they ought to be, because he was the oldest one in camp. He had been hunting deer in these woods for about a hundred years, I reckon, and if anybody would know where a buck would pass, it would be him. Maybe with a big old buck like this one, that had been running the woods for what would amount to a hundred years in a deer's life, too, him and Uncle Ike would sholy manage to be at the same place at the same time this morning—provided, of course, he managed to git away from me and Mister Ernest on the jump. Because me and Mister Ernest was going to git him.

Then me and Mister Ernest and Roth Edmonds set the dogs over, with Simon holding Eagle and the other old dogs on leash because the young ones, the puppies, wasn't going nowhere until Eagle let them, nohow. Then me and Mister Ernest and Roth saddled up, and Mister Ernest got up and I handed him up his pump gun and let Dan's bridle go for him to git rid of the spell of bucking he had to git shut of ever morning until Mister Ernest hit him between the ears with the gun barrel. Then Mister Ernest loaded the gun and give me the stirrup, and I got up behind him and we taken the fire road up toward the bayou, the four big dogs dragging Simon along in front with his single-barrel britchloader slung on a piece of plow line across his back, and the puppies moiling along in ever'body's way. It was light now and it was going to be jest fine; the east already yellow for the sun and our breaths smoking in the cold still bright air until the sun would come up and warm it, and a little skim of ice in the ruts, and ever leaf and twig and switch and even the frozen clods frosted over, waiting to sparkle like a rainbow when the sun finally come up and hit them. Until all my insides felt light and strong as a balloon, full of that light cold strong air, so that

it seemed to me like I couldn't even feel the horse's back I was straddle of—jest the hot strong muscles moving under the hot strong skin, setting up there without no weight atall, so that when old Eagle struck and jumped, me and Dan and Mister Ernest would go jest like a bird, not even touching the ground. It was jest fine. When that big old buck got killed today, I knowed that even if he had put it off another ten years, he couldn't 'a' picked a better one.

And sho enough, as soon as we come to the bayou we seen his foot in the mud where he had come up out of the river last night, spread in the soft mud like a cow's foot, big as a cow's, big as a mule's, with Eagle and the other dogs laying into the leash rope now until Mister Ernest told me to jump down and help Simon hold them. Because me and Mister Ernest knowed exactly where he would be—a little canebrake island in the middle of the bayou, where he could lay up until whatever doe or little deer the dogs had happened to jump could go up or down the bayou in either direction and take the dogs on away, so he could steal out and creep back down the bayou to the river and swim it, and leave the country like he always done the day the season opened.

Which is jest what we never aimed for him to do this time. So we left Roth on his horse to cut him off and turn him over Uncle Ike's standers if he tried to slip back down the bayou, and me and Simon, with the leashed dogs, walked on up the bayou until Mister Ernest on the horse said it was fur enough; then turned up into the woods about half a quarter above the brake because the wind was going to be south this morning when it riz, and turned down toward the brake, and Mister Ernest give the word to cast them, and we slipped the leash and Mister Ernest give me the stirrup again and I got up.

Old Eagle had done already took off because he knowed where that old son of a gun would be laying as good as we did, not making no racket atall yet, but jest boring on through the buck vines with the other dogs trailing along behind him, and even Dan seemed to know about that buck, too, beginning to

souple up and jump a little through the vines, so that I taken my holt on Mister Ernest's belt already before the time had come for Mister Ernest to touch him. Because when we got strung out, going fast behind a deer, I wasn't on Dan's back much of the time nohow, but mostly jest strung out from my holt on Mister Ernest's belt, so that Willy Legate said that when we was going through the woods fast, it looked like Mister Ernest had a boy-size pair of empty overalls blowing out of his hind pocket.

So it wasn't even a strike, it was a jump. Eagle must 'a' walked right up behind him or maybe even stepped on him while he was laying there still thinking it was day after tomorrow. Eagle jest throwed his head back and up and said, "There he goes," and we even heard the buck crashing through the first of the cane. Then all the other dogs was hollering behind him, and Dan give a squat to jump, but it was against the curb this time, not jest the snaffle, and Mister Ernest let him down into the bayou and swung him around the brake and up the other bank. Only he never had to say, "Which way?" because I was already pointing past his shoulder, freshening my holt on the belt jest as Mister Ernest touched Dan with that big old rusty spur on his nigh heel, because when Dan felt it he would go off jest like a stick of dynamite, straight through whatever he could bust and over or under what he couldn't.

The dogs was already almost out of hearing. Eagle must 'a' been looking right up that big son of a gun's tail until he finally decided he better git on out of there. And now they must 'a' been getting pretty close to Uncle Ike's standers, and Mister Ernest reined Dan back and held him, squatting and bouncing and trembling like a mule having his tail roached, while we listened for the shots. But never none come, and I hollered to Mister Ernest we better go on while I could still hear the dogs, and he let Dan off, but still there wasn't no shots, and now we knowed the race had done already passed the standers; and we busted out of a thicket, and sho enough there was Uncle Ike and Willy standing beside his foot in a soft patch.

"He got through us all," Uncle Ike said. "I don't know how he done it. I just had a glimpse of him. He looked big as a elephant, with a rack on his head you could cradle a yellin' calf in. He went right on down the ridge. You better get on, too; that Hog Bayou camp might not miss him."

So I freshened my holt and Mister Ernest touched Dan again. The ridge run due south; it was clear of vines and bushes so we could go fast, into the wind, too, because it had riz now, and now the sun was up too. So we would hear the dogs again any time now as the wind got up; we could make time now, but still holding Dan back to a canter, because it was either going to be quick, when he got down to the standers from that Hog Bayou camp eight miles below oun, or a long time, in case he got by them too. And sho enough, after a while we heard the dogs; we was walking Dan now to let him blow a while, and we heard them, the sound coming faint up the wind, not running now, but trailing because the big son of a gun had decided a good piece back, probably, to put a end to this foolishness, and picked hisself up and soupled out and put about a mile between hisself and the dogs—until he run up on them other standers from that camp below. I could almost see him stopped behind a bush, peeping out and saying, "What's this? What's this? Is this whole durn country full of folks this morning?" Then looking back over his shoulder at where old Eagle and the others was hollering along after him while he decided how much time he had to decide what to do next.

Except he almost shaved it too fine. We heard the shots; it sounded like a war. Old Eagle must 'a' been looking right up his tail again and he had to bust on through the best way he could. "Pow, pow, pow, pow" and then "Pow, pow, pow, pow," like it must 'a' been three or four ganged right up on him before he had time even to swerve, and me hollering, "No! No! Nol Nol" because he was oun. It was our beans and oats he et and our brake he laid in; we had been watching him ever year, and it was like we had raised him, to be killed at last on our jump, in front of our dogs, by some strangers that would probably try

to beat the dogs off and drag him away before we could even git a piece of the meat.

"Shut up and listen," Mister Ernest said. So I done it and we could hear the dogs; not just the others, but Eagle, too, not trailing no scent now and not baying no downed meat, neither, but running hot on sight long after the shooting was over. I jest had time to freshen my holt. Yes, sir, they was running on sight. Like Willy Legate would say, if Eagle jest had a drink of whisky he would ketch that deer; going on, done already gone when we broke out of the thicket and seen the fellers that had done the shooting, five or six of them, squatting and crawling around, looking at the ground and the bushes, like maybe if they looked hard enough, spots of blood would bloom out on the stalks and leaves like frogstools or hawberries.

"Have any luck, boys?" Mister Ernest said.

"I think I hit him," one of them said. "I know I did. We're hunting blood now."

"Well, when you have found him, blow your horn and I'll come back and tote him in to camp for you," Mister Ernest said.

So we went on, going fast now because the race was almost out of hearing again, going fast, too, like not jest the buck, but the dogs, too, had took a new leash on life from all the excitement and shooting.

We was in strange country now because we never had to run this fur before, we had always killed before now; now we had come to Hog Bayou that runs into the river a good fifteen miles below our camp. It had water in it, not to mention a mess of down trees and logs and such, and Mister Ernest checked Dan again, saying, "Which way?" I could just barely hear them, off to the east a little, like the old son of a gun had give up the idea of Vicksburg or New Orleans, like he first seemed to have, and had decided to have a look at Alabama; so I pointed and we turned up the bayou hunting for a crossing, and maybe we could 'a' found one, except that I reckon Mister Ernest decided we never had time to wait.

We come to a place where the bayou had narrowed down to

about twelve or fifteen feet, and Mister Ernest said, "Look out, I'm going to touch him" and done it.

I didn't even have time to freshen my holt when we was already in the air, and then I seen the vine—it was a loop of grapevine nigh as big as my wrist, looping down right across the middle of the bayou—and I thought he seen it, too, and was jest waiting to grab it and fling it up over our heads to go under it, and I know Dan seen it because he even ducked his head to jump under it. But Mister Ernest never seen it atall until it skun back along Dan's neck and hooked under the head of the saddle horn, us flying on through the air, the loop of the vine gitting tighter and tighter until something somewhere was going to have to give. It was the saddle girth. It broke, and Dan going on and scrabbling up the other bank bare nekkid except for the bridle, and me and Mister Ernest and the saddle, Mister Ernest still setting in the saddle holding the gun, and me still holding onto Mister Ernest's belt, hanging in the air over the bayou in the tightened loop of that vine like in the drawed-back loop of a big rubber-banded slingshot, until it snapped back and shot us back across the bayou and flang us clear, me still holding onto Mister Ernest's belt and on the bottom now, so that when we lit I would 'a' had Mister Ernest and the saddle both on top of me if I hadn't clumb fast around the saddle and up Mister Ernest's side, so that when we landed, it was the saddle first, then Mister Ernest, and me on top, until I jumped up, and Mister Ernest still laying there with jest the white rim of his eyes showing.

"Mister Ernest!" I hollered, and then clumb down to the bayou and scooped my cap full of water and clumb back and throwed it in his face, and he opened his eyes and laid there on the saddle cussing me.

"God dawg it," he said, "why didn't you stay behind where you started out?"

"You was the biggest!" I said. "You would 'a' mashed me flat!"

"What do you think you done to me?" Mister Ernest said.

"Next time, if you can't stay where you start out, jump clear. Don't climb up on top of me no more. You hear?"

"Yes, sir," I said.

So he got up then, still cussing and holding his back, and clumb down to the water and dipped some in his hand onto his face and neck and dipped some more up and drunk it, and I drunk some, too, and clumb back and got the saddle and the gun, and we crossed the bayou on the down logs. If we could jest ketch Dan; not that he would have went them fifteen miles back to camp, because, if anything, he would have went on by hisself to try to help Eagle ketch that buck. But he was about fifty yards away, eating buck vines, so I brought him back, and we taken Mister Ernest's galluses and my belt and the whang leather loop off Mister Ernest's horn and tied the saddle back on Dan. It didn't look like much, but maybe it would hold.

"Provided you don't let me jump him through no more grape-vines without hollering first," Mister Ernest said.

"Yes, sir," I said. "I'll holler first next time—provided you'll holler a little quicker when you touch him next time too." But it was all right; we jest had to be a little easy getting up. "Now which-a-way?" I said. Because we couldn't hear nothing now, after wasting all this time. And this was new country, sho enough. It had been cut over and growed up in thickets we couldn't 'a' seen over even standing up on Dan.

But Mister Ernest never even answered. He jest turned Dan along the bank of the bayou where it was a little more open and we could move faster again, soon as Dan and us got used to that homemade cinch strop and got a little confidence in it. Which jest happened to be east, or so I thought then, because I never paid no particular attention to east then because the sun—I don't know where the morning had went, but it was gone, the morning and the frost, too—was up high now.

And then we heard him. No, that's wrong; what we heard was shots. And that was when we realized how fur we had come, because the only camp we knowed about in that direc-

tion was the Hollyknowe camp, and Hollyknowe was exactly twenty-eight miles from Van Dorn, where me and Mister Ernest lived—just the shots, no dogs nor nothing. If old Eagle was still behind him and the buck was still alive, he was too wore out now to even say, "Here he comes."

"Don't touch him!" I hollered. But Mister Ernest remembered that cinch strop, too, and he jest let Dan off the snaffle. And Dan heard them shots, too, picking his way through the thickets, hopping the vines and logs when he could and going under them when he couldn't. And sho enough, it was jest like before—two or three men squatting and creeping among the bushes, looking for blood that Eagle had done already told them wasn't there. But we never stopped this time, jest trotting on by. Then Mister Ernest swung Dan until we was going due north.

"Wait!" I hollered. "Not this way."

But Mister Ernest jest turned his face back over his shoulder. It looked tired, too, and there was a smear of mud on it where that 'ere grapevine had snatched him off the horse.

"Don't you know where he's heading?" he said. "He's done done his part, give everybody a fair open shot at him, and now he's going home, back to that brake in our bayou. He ought to make it exactly at dark."

And that's what he was doing. We went on. It didn't matter to hurry now. There wasn't no sound nowhere; it was that time in the early afternoon in November when don't nothing move or cry, not even birds, the peckerwoods and yellowhammers and jays, and it seemed to me like I could see all three of us—me and Mister Ernest and Dan—and Eagle, and the other dogs, and that big old buck, moving through the quiet woods in the same direction, headed for the same place, not running now but walking, that had all run the fine race the best we knowed how, and all three of us now turned like on a agreement to walk back home, not together in a bunch because we didn't want to worry or tempt one another, because what we had all three spent this morning doing was no play-acting jest for fun, but was serious, and all three of us was still what we was—that old buck that

had to run, not because he was skeered, but because running was what he done the best and was proudest at; and Eagle and the dogs that chased him, not because they hated or feared him, but because that was the thing they done the best and was proudest at; and me and Mister Ernest and Dan, that run him not because we wanted his meat, which would be too tough to eat anyhow, or his head to hang on a wall, but because now we could go back and work hard for eleven months making a crop, so we would have the right to come back here next November—all three of us going back home now, peaceful and separate, until next year, next time.

Then we seen him for the first time. We was out of the cut-over now; we could even 'a' cantered, except that all three of us was long past that. So we was walking, too, when we come on the dogs—the puppies and one of the old ones—played out, laying in a little wet swag, panting, jest looking up at us when we passed. Then we come to a long open glade, and we seen the three other old dogs and about a hundred yards ahead of them Eagle, all walking, not making no sound; and then suddenly, at the fur end of the glade, the buck hisself getting up from where he had been resting for the dogs to come up, getting up without no hurry, big, big as a mule, tall as a mule, and turned, and the white underside of his tail for a second or two more before the thicket taken him.

It might 'a' been a signal, a good-by, a farewell. Still walking, we passed the other three old dogs in the middle of the glade, laying down, too; and still that hundred yards ahead of them, Eagle, too, not laying down, because he was still on his feet, but his legs was spraddled and his head was down; maybe jest waiting until we was out of sight of his shame, his eyes saying plain as talk when we passed, "I'm sorry, boys, but this here is all."

Mister Ernest stopped Dan. "Jump down and look at his feet," he said.

"Nothing wrong with his feet," I said. "It's his wind has done give out."

"Jump down and look at his feet," Mister Ernest said.

So I done it, and while I was stooping over Eagle I could hear the pump gun go, "Snick-cluck. Snick-cluck. Snick-cluck" three times, except that I never thought nothing then. Maybe he was jest running the shells through to be sho it would work when we seen him again or maybe to make sho they was all buckshot. Then I got up again, and we went on, still walking; a little west of north now, because when we seen his white flag that second or two before the thicket hid it, it was on a beeline for that notch in the bayou. And it was evening, too, now. The wind had done dropped and there was a edge to the air and the sun jest touched the tops of the trees. And he was taking the easiest way, too, now, going straight as he could. When we seen his foot in the soft places he was running for a while at first after his rest. But soon he was walking, too, like he knowed, too, where Eagle and the dogs was.

And then we seen him again. It was the last time—a thicket, with the sun coming through a hole onto it like a searchlight. He crashed jest once; then he was standing there broadside to us, not twenty yards away, big as a statue and red as gold in the sun, and the sun sparkling on the tips of his horns—they was twelve of them—so that he looked like he had twelve lighted candles branched around his head, standing there looking at us while Mister Ernest raised the gun and aimed at his neck, and the gun went, "Click. Snick-cluck. Click. Snick-cluck. Click. Snick-cluck" three times, and Mister Ernest still holding the gun aimed while the buck turned and give one long bound, the white underside of his tail like a blaze of fire, too, until the thicket and the shadows put it out; and Mister Ernest laid the gun slow and gentle back across the saddle in front of him, saying quiet and peaceful, and not much louder than jest breathing, "God dawg. God dawg."

Then he jogged me with his elbow and we got down, easy and careful because of that ere cinch strop, and he reached into his vest and taken out one of the cigars. It was busted where I had fell on it, I reckon, when we hit the ground. He throwed

it away and taken out the other one. It was busted, too, so he bit off a hunk of it to chew and throwed the rest away. And now the sun was gone even from the tops of the trees and there wasn't nothing left but a big red glare in the west.

"Don't worry," I said. "I ain't going to tell them you forgot to load your gun. For that matter, they don't need to know we ever seed him."

"Much oblige," Mister Ernest said. There wasn't going to be no moon tonight neither, so he taken the compass off the whang leather loop in his buttonhole and handed me the gun and set the compass on a stump and stepped back and looked at it. "Jest about the way we're headed now," he said, and taken the gun from me and opened it and put one shell in the britch and taken up the compass, and I taken Dan's reins and we started, with him in front with the compass in his hand.

And after a while it was full dark; Mister Ernest would have to strike a match ever now and then to read the compass, until the stars come out good and we could pick out one to follow, because I said, "How fur do you reckon it is?" and he said, "A little more than one box of matches." So we used a star when we could, only we couldn't see it all the time because the woods was too dense and we would git a little off until he would have to spend another match. And now it was good and late, and he stopped and said, "Get on the horse."

"I ain't tired," I said.

"Get on the horse," he said. "We don't want to spoil him."

Because he had been a good feller ever since I had knowed him, which was even before that day two years ago when maw went off with the Vicksburg roadhouse feller and the next day pap didn't come home neither, and on the third one Mister Ernest rid Dan up to the door of the cabin on the river he let us live in, so pap could work his piece of land and run his fish line, too, and said, "Put that gun down and come on here and climb up behind."

So I got in the saddle even if I couldn't reach the stirrups, and Mister Ernest taken the reins and I must 'a' went to sleep,

because the next thing I knowed a buttonhole of my lumberjack was tied to the saddle horn with that ere whang cord off the compass, and it was good and late now and we wasn't fur, because Dan was already smelling water, the river. Or maybe it was the feed lot itself he smelled, because we struck the fire road not a quarter below it, and soon I could see the river, too, with the white mist laying on it soft and still as cotton. Then the lot, home; and up yonder in the dark, not no piece akchully, close enough to hear us unsaddling and shucking corn prob'ly, and sholy close enough to hear Mister Ernest blowing his horn at the dark camp for Simon to come in the boat and git us, that old buck in his brake in the bayou; home, too, resting, too, after the hard run, waking hisself now and then, dreaming of dogs behind him or maybe it was the racket we was making would wake him.

Then Mister Ernest stood on the bank blowing until Simon's lantern went bobbing down into the mist; then we clumb down to the landing and Mister Ernest blowed again now and then to guide Simon, until we seen the lantern in the mist, and then Simon and the boat; only it looked like ever time I set down and got still, I went back to sleep, because Mister Ernest was shaking me again to git out and climb the bank into the dark camp, until I felt a bed against my knees and tumbled into it.

Then it was morning, tomorrow; it was all over now until next November, next year, and we could come back. Uncle Ike and Willy and Walter and Roth and the rest of them had come in yestiddy, soon as Eagle taken the buck out of hearing and they knowed that deer was gone, to pack up and be ready to leave this morning for Yoknapatawpha, where they lived, until it would be November again and they could come back again.

So, as soon as we et breakfast, Simon run them back up the river in the big boat to where they left their cars and pickups, and now it wasn't nobody but jest me and Mister Ernest setting on the bench against the kitchen wall in the sun; Mister Ernest smoking a cigar—a whole one this time that Dan hadn't had no chance to jump him through a grapevine and bust. He

hadn't washed his face neither where that vine had throwed him into the mud. But that was all right, too; his face usually did have a smudge of mud or tractor grease or beard stubble on it, because he wasn't jest a planter; he was a farmer, he worked as hard as ara one of his hands and tenants—which is why I knowed from the very first that we would git along, that I wouldn't have no trouble with him and he wouldn't have no trouble with me, from that very first day when I woke up and maw had done gone off with that Vicksburg roadhouse feller without even waiting to cook breakfast, and the next morning pap was gone, too, and it was almost night the next day when I heard a horse coming up and I taken the gun that I had already throwed a shell into the britch when pap never come home last night, and stood in the door while Mister Ernest rid up and said, "Come on. Your paw ain't coming back neither."

"You mean he give me to you?" I said.

"Who cares?" he said. "Come on. I brought a lock for the door. We'll send the pickup back tomorrow for whatever you want."

So I come home with him and it was all right, it was jest fine—his wife had died about three years ago—without no women to worry us or take off in the middle of the night with a durn Vicksburg roadhouse jake without even waiting to cook breakfast. And we would go home this afternoon, too, but not jest yet; we always stayed one more day after the others left because Uncle Ike always left what grub they hadn't et, and the rest of the homemade corn whisky he drunk and that town whisky of Roth Edmondziz he called Scotch that smelled like it come out of a old bucket of roof paint; setting in the sun for one more day before we went back home to git ready to put in next year's crop of cotton and oats and beans and hay; and across the river yonder, behind the wall of trees where the big woods started, that old buck laying up today in the sun, too—resting today, too, without nobody to bother him until next November.

So at least one of us was glad it would be eleven months and two weeks before he would have to run that fur that fast again. So he was glad of the very same thing we was sorry of, and so

all of a sudden I thought about how maybe planting and working and then harvesting oats and cotton and beans and hay wasn't jest something me and Mister Ernest done three hundred and fifty-one days to fill in the time until we could come back hunting again, but it was something we had to do, and do honest and good during the three hundred and fifty-one days, to have the right to come back into the big woods and hunt for the other fourteen; and the fourteen days that old buck run in front of dogs wasn't jest something to fill his time until the three hundred and fifty-one when he didn't have to, but the running and the risking in front of guns and dogs was something he had to do for fourteen days to have the right not to be bothered for the other three hundred and fifty-one. And so the hunting and the farming wasn't two different things atall—they was jest the other side of each other.

"Yes," I said. "All we got to do now is put in that next year's crop. Then November won't be no time away."

"You ain't going to put in the crop next year," Mister Ernest said. "You're going to school."

So at first I didn't even believe I had heard him. "What?" I said. "Me? Go to school?"

"Yes," Mister Ernest said. "You must make something out of yourself."

"I am," I said. "I'm doing it now. I'm going to be a hunter and a farmer like you."

"No," Mister Ernest said. "That ain't enough any more. Time was when all a man had to do was just farm eleven and a half months, and hunt the other half. But not now. Now just to belong to the farming business and the hunting business ain't enough. You got to belong to the business of mankind."

"Mankind?" I said.

"Yes," Mister Ernest said. "So you're going to school. Because you got to know why. You can belong to the farming and hunting business and you can learn the difference between what's right and what's wrong, and do right. And that used to be

enough—just to do right. But not now. You got to know why it's right and why it's wrong, and be able to tell the folks that never had no chance to learn it; teach them how to do what's right, not just because they know it's right, but because they know now why it's right because you just showed them, told them, taught them why. So you're going to school."

"It's because you been listening to that durn Will Legate and Walter Ewell!" I said.

"No," Mister Ernest said.

"Yes!" I said. "No wonder you missed that buck yestiddy, taking ideas from the very fellers that let him git away, after me and you had run Dan and the dogs durn nigh clean to death! Because you never even missed him! You never forgot to load that gun! You had done already unloaded it a purpose! I heard you!"

"All right, all right," Mister Ernest said. "Which would you rather have? His bloody head and hide on the kitchen floor yonder and half his meat in a pickup truck on the way to Yoknapatawpha County, or him with his head and hide and meat still together over yonder in that brake, waiting for next November for us to run him again?"

"And git him, too," I said. "We won't even fool with no Willy Legate and Walter Ewell next time."

"Maybe," Mister Ernest said.

"Yes," I said.

"Maybe," Mister Ernest said. "The best word in our language, the best of all. That's what mankind keeps going on: Maybe. The best days of his life ain't the ones when he said 'Yes' beforehand: they're the ones when all he knew to say was 'Maybe.' He can't say 'Yes' until afterward because he not only don't know it until then, he don't want to know 'Yes' until then. . . . Step in the kitchen and make me a toddy. Then we'll see about dinner."

"All right," I said. I got up. "You want some of Uncle Ike's corn or that town whisky of Roth Edmondziz?"

"Can't you say Mister Roth or Mister Edmonds?" Mister Ernest said.

"Yes, sir," I said. "Well, which do you want? Uncle Ike's corn or that ere stuff of Roth Edmondziz?"

THE GRAINS OF PARADISE

By JAMES STREET

I do not like stories that suggest one thing and mean another and so, right off, I want you to know that the grains of paradise are the seeds of little hot peppers, very hot; and that this is a story about some fiery little peppers and some people in the village of Feliz, which is down in Mexico's state of Tabasco and nine hundred miles from nowhere.

The hotel was on a corner when I was there years ago, and across the way was a church which was surrounded by a gray wall, and the wall was shared by bougainvillaea, buzzards and unmeasured time. It was midafternoon when I got out of the bus at the hotel. The bus was painted purple and yellow, and bore the name of Rosaura, painted in red. I am sure it was the name of the driver's sweetheart. In Feliz, everything was personalized.

An Indian was sleeping by the doorway. And his ox team was sleeping, hitched to a two-wheeled cart, and two or three dogs. Everything was sleeping. Nothing stirred in the high-mountain solitude of Feliz. The hotel was cool inside, and shadowy, and the clerk opened his eyes when he heard my steps and greeted me sleepily in Spanish. I replied in Spanish, my very best, and that's pretty bad.

Quickly he was alert and spoke to me in English. His English was no better than my Spanish. He was smaller than I am, considerably smaller, and I am about average. His clothes were mussed, but his little black mustache was trim.

I signed the register, and he studied my signature and then he spoke it aloud, "Mr. Cordell Hoyle, Lystra, North Carolina."

For a second he hesitated, and looked up at me and down at my name, and I had the feeling he was going to ask me a question or make some comment, some pleasantry about the weather or the trip or maybe about American visitors. But he didn't. He asked me if I'd had lunch, and when I told him I hadn't, he said that the kitchen was closed, but that he'd arrange for me to have a snack after I'd washed up. Then he hissed, "Psst, psst," and a barefooted Indian came out of the shadows. The clerk told him to take my bags to Room No. 3.

It was a bowl-and-pitcher room and was on the corner and had two windows. Out of one I could see the plaza of Feliz, empty at that hour and its trees drooping their somnolence. Out of the other I could see the church—the Church of the Tears of the Blessed Virgin—and beyond the church were the mountains, hovering high in desperate grandeur, heavy green for miles, then hazy blue into the sky.

It was these mountains that had brought me to Southern Mexico, down almost to where the country joins Guatemala. In those days I worked for the University of North Carolina's College of Agriculture and for months I had been in Tabasco and in the adjacent state of Chiapas, looking for a certain variety of corn to be used for experimental purposes. I hadn't found the corn and had come to Feliz to rest a day or two before pulling out for home.

I washed the dust from my face and hands, and changed my shirt and went back to the lobby. The owner of the hotel was there. He was a paunchy man, glistening sweat, and his clothes were as disheveled as the clerk's, and his mustache was just as trim.

None of the Indians had mustaches, but the owner and the

clerk were Ladinos and their mustaches were evidence of this classification, which is economic and not racial. A Ladino is a townsman, an owner of property, a Christian who follows Latin ways. He wears shoes, and never sandals, and always the mustache. He may be part Indian, a mestizo, but he is never all Indian.

The Indians profess Christianity, in a way, but really cling to their Mayan faith. Some own property in town, but not many. There is a caste barrier between the Ladinos and the Indians, and, again, this is economic and not racial.

The clerk introduced me to the owner, whose name I do not remember, and he said that my lunch would be ready in a few minutes, and walked away. I leaned against the desk and lit a cigarette, and then I remembered my manners and offered one to the clerk. He accepted it gravely and with thanks.

"I have been in the United States," he said.

"Is that so? Where?"

"I went to school in the United States. For a year."

"Yes? Where?"

He looked at the ash of his cigarette and tapped it off. "In Mississippi." He glanced at me quickly, almost defiantly, as though he expected me to challenge him or laugh, or something.

"The university?" I asked. "Or Mississippi State?"

"No." He was not quite sure of himself, even timid, and I wondered what the to-do was about and why the hesitation, and then he said, "At a place you never heard of, I'm sure. At Hattiesburg, Mississippi. There's a college there."

I laughed. "Hattiesburg! Well, now, whatta you know."

He drew back. "It is amusing?"

"No. Just cockeyed. Funny peculiar, not funny laughing. I married in Hattiesburg."

"You say?" He was very serious.

"Yes, I say. My wife's from Hattiesburg. So you went to Mississippi Southern, huh?"

Have you ever seen gratitude and good will ooze from a man? No, "flow" is a better word. Have you ever seen a man so

pleased that he just sort of melts, and grins? That's what this fellow did. He flipped away his cigarette, a sassy, cocky little flip, and propped his elbow on the register. "You went to Mississippi Southern?"

"No. But I know about it."

"Where is it?"

"In Hattiesburg. Like you said." I wasn't peeved, but maybe a little bit short because I couldn't figure out what he was getting at.

"Where in Hattiesburg?"

"Now look, mister. I don't follow you. Mississippi Southern is a college in the little city of Hattiesburg, and Hattiesburg is in Southern Mississippi. You go down—yes, you go down West Pine Street, past the post office, and make a bend to the right. That'll be Hardy Street. Then out Hardy Street, past a cemetery, and on out to the college. What's it all about?"

His smile was so bright and so warm that I began grinning, and then I laughed again, and so did he.

"I tell you." He reached out his hand and we shook. "My name is Tio Felipe Ignacio de Fuestes. The people here call me Tio."

"Yes?" I knew I mustn't hurry him.

"This is not my village. I am of Mérida, in Yucatán."

"Mérida, huh?"

"I was a tourist guide. To the ruins and places. I met a professor from Mississippi Southern and he got me in and helped me. He was Professor Johnson. You know him maybe—Professor Johnson?"

I said I didn't, and looked in toward the dining room, where an Indian girl was putting my lunch on a table. She wore a brightly colored blouse and her hand-woven skirt was tight around her thighs. She was barefooted and as graceful as a cat, and as noiseless.

The clerk came out from behind the desk and stood between me and the girl, and touched my arm to get my attention. "The people in this village will not believe I went to school in the United States."

"The devil you say. What's so strange about going to school in the United States? Lots of Mexicans do."

He shrugged that mean-anything gesture of Latins, the hands out and the shoulders rising. "Not to Hattiesburg, Mississippi, Mr. Hoyle. If I had told them New Orleans or Texas. Or Florida or California. But Hattiesburg, Mississippi——" He shrugged again.

I knew exactly what he meant—exactly. Hattiesburg, Mississippi, just doesn't sound like a place where a man would go to college from a long ways off. Boston, yes. Chicago, New York, Atlanta—a dozen places, a hundred. But not Mississippi Southern in Hattiesburg. So I knew he was telling the truth. There was no reason for him to kid me and, besides, a fourflusher never would have picked out Hattiesburg.

"The Ladinos think I have lied. To show off," he explained.

"Making like a big shot. I follow you now."

"The Indians don't care, or matter. But the Ladinos think I am a big mouth."

"And you want me to tell them that you really have been to school in the United States. O.K. I'll tell them."

"Only a few North Americans ever come to Feliz. From Los Angeles, New York—places like that. They have never heard of my college. Or of Hattiesburg. I ask them and they look at me and shake their heads, and the Ladinos laugh."

The Indian waitress had stepped back from my table and my lunch was ready, and so I told the fellow to send the scoffers to me and that I'd put them right, and I went into the dining room. A couple of greasy meat patties were on my plate, and some canned corn and shriveled tomatoes. In a land that dripped exotic fruits, a land of fine peppers and black beans, here I was getting lunch-wagon hamburgers. Anyway, the coffee was good.

I was thinking of enchiladas and avocados, of thin tortillas spread with black-bean paste or mountain honey, and then the owner came in and pulled up a chair. He "Psst-psst'd" at the Indian girl and she brought him a cup of coffee. He sipped his brew noisily and wiped his mustache with his fingers.

"Tio——" He nodded toward the lobby. "Tio in there tells me you have been in Mississippi."

"That's right. In Hattiesburg. I know about the college where he went."

He was not impressed and took another sip of coffee. "There is a hotel in this place?"

"Two or three, last time I was there." I was having fun, sort of like playing a quiz game. "The largest one was the Forrest Hotel."

Now he was impressed, but tried not to show it. Even so, he was persistent, "Tio says there is a railroad in this place."

"Three, last time I was there." I didn't like the owner particularly, and thought it was about time to dress him down. I figured him for a flabby little tyrant who probably had given Tio a hard time. "Tell you something, mister." I pushed my empty cup away and lit a cigarette. "Your clerk says he has been to college in Hattiesburg, Mississippi. He has. I've got a hundred pesos to ten pesos that he has."

I have never seen a Latin American who wouldn't cover a bet if he had the slightest outside chance of winning.

"A hundred to ten," I repeated, and loud enough for the Indian waitress to hear.

The owner drained his cup and got up. "I never bet with strangers. Have some more coffee, Mr. Hoyle, but you will excuse me, please."

He left me and walked out into the afternoon, and I knew to spread the news that Tio really had been to college, like he said, and that he was willing to bet that it was so, and that he had a gringo to back it up.

Tio waited until the boss was safely away, and came to my table and sat down, and the waitress brought him coffee without being told to do so. She smiled at him, a quick, sly little smile of triumph shared. "You have done me a gracious service, Mr. Hoyle." He offered me one of his own cigarettes and lit one for himself.

"That's more than you've done for me." I nodded toward the food that I hadn't touched. "Is this the sort of stuff you eat?"

Tio was surprised. "I thought you would approve. I told them about the hamburgers. In Hattiesburg—hamburgers. Day and night, hamburgers."

"In Mexico I like Mexican food. Good hot Mexican food, red-hot."

"Oh?" Tio was delighted and proud. "You say?"

"Sure, I say. Have you got any tortillas back there? And bean paste? And some hot peppers?"

Tio clapped his hands like a proprietor, and the waitress came running, and he spoke to her so rapidly that I caught none of it, and she, too, was proud and hurried back to the kitchen. Tio leaned back in his chair and blew smoke toward the ceiling, like a man suddenly sure of himself, like a bantam cockerel that had found his way around the barnyard. "It is the food of the land, my friend."

The tortillas were thin and the bean paste was spicy and without lumps. And there was a bottle of beer with a red rooster on the label. The peppers, however, weren't much. No authority. Long red peppers that had been dried so long that their kick was gone. I recognized them immediately as Ashanti, the dried fruit of *Piper Clusii*. I picked up one and tasted it, and to me it was almost bland.

"Be careful," Tio cautioned me. "They are hot."

"Hot? Those things?" I tossed the pepper back into the dish and took a long swallow of beer. "They are for children. For nursing children."

"They do not burn?" Tio's cigarette was almost to his fingers and he seemed not to notice it. "There is no sweat? No fire in the belly?"

"Listen, my friend." I picked up another of the peppers and tore it open and tasted the seeds, and they were mild. That is, to me they were mild. "I'm a hot-pepper man, Tio. And when I say hot-pepper man, I mean *hot-pepper man*."

"But they do not eat hot peppers in the United States. Here and there, yes. But hot peppers there are weak peppers here."

"I'm from here and there." I spread a tortilla thick with bean paste and smacked my delight. "I used to live in Louisiana and they have hot peppers in Louisiana. Little red devils with fire in their skin and hell in their seeds."

Tio clapped his hands again and spoke to the Indian girl, and she quickly was back with a little bowl of *furiás*. Nice and fat and sort of a greenish yellow. They had been steeped in vinegar, though, and much of the sting was out. Still, they had some authority, unless you happen to be a hot-pepper man like me. I took two of them in one bite, and the waitress actually gaped at me, and turned and ran back to the kitchen.

Tio was fascinated. "You do not sweat. Or grab for the beer. You do not even blow your breath out hard. This is a thing, my friend. Those are *furiás*."

"For growing boys," I said.

The Indian girl had come back to the doorway of the dining room, and three or four other Indians were with her, and they were watching me. Tio waved his hand and she ran and fetched a bottle of beer for him.

"Bring two more," he said. "And one for Manuel in the kitchen, and one for Ricardo in the garden. For Pablo and Pedro." The boss was gone and he really was big-wheeling. "One over to Father Francisco. To little Father Diego and big Father Diego. A Rooster beer for all."

The hotel was as gay as a *cantina*. The Indians beamed and the chef gave the waitress a pat when she passed by him. Tio went to the desk and took two cigars from the owner's private box, and we lit up.

Then he said, "So you like Mexican food. And hot peppers. You will come with me. I take you to the place of Hilario Villa-real."

I was warm inside from the beer and peppers, and felt chipper for the first time in weeks, and he told one of the Indians to

look after things and we went forth. The village was waking up and some of our hotel Indians were shooting off firecrackers over by the church gate.

"To arouse the saints from their siesta," Tio explained. "They think the saints should be up and about their jobs."

We crossed over to the plaza and walked around it twice. He was puffing his cigar and talking up a storm and making sure that everybody in the plaza saw us together. He led the way into a *cantina* and ordered two more beers. A radio was limping a scratchy melody, and Tio spoke up so all could hear, "In Feliz, not so much as a movie. In Hattiesburg, Mississippi—in Hattiesburg, where I went to college, talking pictures every night. And the baseball."

"You tell 'em, brother," I said. "In Hattiesburg, the football also. And hamburgers."

"You tell 'em, brother," he said.

We made another round of the plaza, in case somebody had missed us, and Tio was silent for a spell, a mighty short one. Then he glanced up at me and away, and said, "In Hattiesburg, my friends called me Chili. I didn't mind. In Mexico, chili is a pepper. In Hattiesburg, it is meat and beans and pepper powder. But they called me Chili. You know how it is up there. Always the nickname."

"Chili, huh? O.K., Chili. My friends call me Pete." I started laughing. "Goes back to when I was so high. Just a kid. Little boy." I don't know why I told him, just wanted to tell him. "Used to run around playing like I was a biddy, a little chicken. Going 'Peep, peep.' My sister got to calling me Peep, and it got to be Pete. You know how it is."

He took off his hat and leaned against a tree and laughed. "O.K., Pete. Now we go to the place of Hilario Villareal. Me and you."

We walked on, and again he was silent, this time for several minutes. The beer was wearing off and I noticed that he was frowning.

At last he said, "About me going to college in the United States. I told you the Indians do not care, and do not matter. Well, Hilario Villareal is an Indian. He matters."

I knew that something was eating him and that he would tell me at his own time. Sure enough, we had walked almost another block and he picked up his story. "Hilario Villareal is the best pepper man in Feliz. He eats *furias* for breakfast. With beer."

"They'll wake you up all right," I said. "And put fire in your blood."

Tio's cigar was soggy and frayed and he threw it away. The exhilaration had gone out of him. "Hilario Villareal grows his own peppers and has a secret. He wet-rots leaves for his plants and grows them on a south slope that is sheltered on three sides. And in the dry season he waters them from a bucket. I tell you to have respect for his peppers. His soil is very sour and his peppers are very hot."

It meant only that the Indian understood prevailing winds, that he used acid soil, humus and controlled moisture. I was looking forward to a session at his table, to a bait of *tacos* and *tortas compuestas*, maybe with some real Capsicums, fresh from the bush and oozing their pungent piperine.

"Hilario Villareal is very proud. He does not like Ladinos. Particularly, he does not like me. He thinks I am a big mouth."

"About Hattiesburg, huh?"

"Yes. He thinks I am a man of guile."

"What do you care?"

"Hilario Villareal has a daughter. Her name is Nena."

So that was it: A Ladino, an Indian girl and her father, who didn't like Ladinos. There was nothing for me to say, and besides, I was hungry. And then we were at Villareal's place. Like the hotel, it was on a corner and several Indians were loafing around the door, and we made our way inside, and there was Hilario Villareal, Indian-faced and grave and with all the dignity of the Mayan, the unchanged. And there was Nena. She and

her father saw us come in, and her father glanced her way and she walked out, across the patio to the family's quarters. I didn't get a good look at her, but what I got was good.

Tio stepped to the counter and bought a little black cigar that was strong enough to do push-ups. I went over and sat at a table, and Tio said to the proprietor, "He is my friend. He has been to Hattiesburg, Mississippi, where I went to school, as you know."

Hilario did not even give him the courtesy of a reply. He was a heavy man, very heavy for an Indian, and, although standing, he folded his hands across his stomach and looked disdainfully away from Tio. Several Indians drifted in and stood around, looking at me and at Tio, but mostly at me.

Then Hilario came over to my table, and I said, "My friend Tio tells me you have the best food in Feliz. And peppers."

"You like Mexican food?"

"Only if it is good."

He walked toward the kitchen, and I looked over at Tio and grinned, and then I looked around the place: the old calendars, a poster about a bullfight in Mexico City, and the clock that advertised an American soft drink.

Hilario was back much sooner than I expected, and I had an idea he wanted me to be through and both of us out of there. He had *tacos* and *tortillas* and honey. Also a little bowl of long peppers. They were *Pipers officinarum*. Tasty, but with about as much kick as ginger ale. The *tacos* were marvelous, however, and the *tortillas* were as thin as paper and the best I had ever eaten. I reached over and picked up one of the peppers and spoke slowly to Tio, so that they all could make out my words, "In Hattiesburg—in Hattiesburg, Mississippi, where you went to college, we eat these for dessert, eh, Chili?"

"Only children," he said, and tilted his cigar. "Sometimes old women who are sick, but always children."

"With sugar and cream." I tossed the pepper back into the bowl.

Hilario came to my table again and ate one of the peppers, smacking his lips in approval. Then he spoke to me, but did not look at me, "You like peppers?"

"Only if they are good."

It was Tio's cue, and he took it. He walked slowly, proudly, to my side and felt in his pocket and pulled out seventeen pesos. It wasn't much—only about \$3.40—but I knew that it was all he had, and he put it on the table and said, "My friend, Pete, is the best pepper man in Feliz."

Hilario glanced scornfully at the money, and with all the contempt of a dueling master who has been challenged by an insolent cove. For a second, I thought he was going to ignore Tio's challenge. That could have led to trouble, and so I took out my wallet and counted out a hundred pesos and slipped them under Tio's wager.

"For a cushion," I said. "The confidence of my friend is worthy of a cushion."

The spectators, all Indians, looked from one to the other, and then hard at Hilario, and he turned his back to me and walked behind his counter and picked up a cigar box and counted the money that was in it. Apparently it wasn't enough, because he left us and, without haste, crossed his patio to the family quarters. Soon he was back, and with Nena.

She never looked up lest she meet the gaze of Tio, but went behind the counter and waited. Hilario put a hundred and seventeen pesos on the table and said, "My daughter will serve us."

I nodded and he sat down and Tio moved closer behind me. The Indians moved over behind Hilario. I pushed the *tacos* aside, but kept the tortillas in front of me.

"You must have bread with peppers?" Hilario asked.

"Never yet have I seen peppers so hot that I must reach for the bread."

"You sweat?" Hilario was laying down the rules.

"In the sun, yes. But never from peppers. With me, the peppers warm my blood, not my skin."

"You blow hard the breath?"

"No."

"Then you sip?"

"No. I nibble."

"I sip."

"That is fair."

I moved the tortillas closer to me, and Nena brought him a bottle of beer, and the rules were set. He could sip and I could nibble. But he must wait a full minute between pepper and beer, and I must wait a full minute between pepper and bread.

Nena brought out some spiced meat and two bowls of ground pepper. One of plain black pepper which is the dried fruit of *Piper nigrum*, picked green. This is the pepper of antiquity, of Malabar and Travancore. This is the pepper that sent men venturing in the days of Solomon and Sheba. Rome paid ransom to Alaric in *Piper nigrum*. It is romantic, but tame. The other bowl contained white pepper, which is *Piper nigrum* prepared from the ripe fruits.

Hilario dipped a bit of meat into the black pepper and another into the white pepper and ate them. I crossed my arms and leaned back in my chair as though I had been given offense.

"No?" Hilario was surprised, and tried not to show it.

"No. Does the hospitality of Feliz offer pap to a stranger?" I took fifty more pesos out of my wallet. "This is for the white pepper and the black pepper. I will not tease my tongue."

Hilario stared at me and some of the hauteur went out of him, and I felt a possibility of understanding between us, of friendship a far way off, but moving toward us. Slowly he reached into his pocket and took out more money and matched my ante.

Then he turned to Nena and said, "The cayennes. Only the cayennes. We have here a man of mettle."

The girl ran across the patio and more Indians came into the place and ranged themselves alongside the counter and behind Hilario. Then Ladinos came in and stood by Tio and behind me. I don't know how the word got around so fast, but there they were: the mustached Ladinos and the Indians, each backing his own kind, for I had become associated with the Ladinos. The

hotel owner was there, and he whispered to Tio and stepped to the table and counted out a hundred pesos and put them in front of me, and stepped back.

Hilario reached into his pocket again, but one of the Indians touched his arm. Then all the Indians gave money to the one and he matched the hotel owner's bet.

Nena came back in and she had a tray of peppers, each kind in little piles. Only cayennes, the burning Capsicums. There are about thirty species of this delicacy, and she had six. There were green infernos and green terrors, yellowjackets and yellow furies, red torrids and red frenzies.

Hilario selected one of the red frenzies and held it up for all to see. It was wrinkled near the stem; then fat and tapering to a point. He put the whole pepper in his mouth and chewed slowly. The Indians nodded solemnly, and as he chewed we both watched the clock, and when a minute had passed he reached for his beer and took a sip.

I pulled the tray close to me and fingered through the frenzies until I found two that suited me, both wrinkling their ripeness and then swelling fat into juice and skin and seeds. I held them up for Tio to approve and put both of them into my mouth. My lips stung and the lining of my mouth was hot quick and then prickling stings. I watched the clock through my minute of grace and took my nibble of tortilla.

The Ladinos crowded around Tio and patted him on the back; not me at all, but my sponsor. Then the hotel owner went among them and they gave him money and he receipted it and laid it on the table. The Indians matched it, digging deep this time because they did not have so much money as the Ladinos.

There was a quizzical look in Hilario's eyes. Maybe it was doubt. But, then, maybe it was admiration because I had taken two red frenzies, and without sweat, without the hard blowing of the breath.

We both took torrids, and this time I took only one. My lips had hardened to the sting, but my mouth was ridging inside. I puckered fast to draw saliva. Then the tingle was in my throat

and deep down, but not yet to the belly. The tortilla helped some.

The bets were anted again and the hotel owner called out that he was offering odds on me. "Seven to five," he called out. "On Mr. Hoyle. He is the friend of Tio, and Tio is my employee, and as all of you know"—he waved his arm in a broad gesture—"my employee went to the school, to the college, in the United States. And Mr. Hoyle, who is my guest, knows the place. This is a truth, and I say seven to five."

There were no takers from among the Indians. They were shamefaced because they had no more money, and the Ladinos snickered. One of the Indians took off his jacket, a hand-woven garment of blue, embroidered with sacred pagan symbols. It was his most valued possession, and he walked to the table to put it there, but Hilario held out his hand and stopped him and shook his head.

Then Hilario spoke to me, ignoring the hotel owner and all the other Ladinos, "You have made your bets, Mr. Hoyle?"

"I have made my bets, Mr. Villareal."

He called his daughter, and she raised her eyes as she walked to him and seemed to be looking at him, but she was looking at Tio. The father spoke low to her, and I did not hear his words, but she nodded understanding and ran across the patio and returned with a little hide-covered box. Hilario counted out five hundred pesos—about a hundred dollars. A lot of money anywhere, a fortune in Feliz. "I take no odds," he said. "Cover the wager, gentlemen."

The Ladinos hesitated and Tio was embarrassed for them and jerked off his ring and threw it on the table. It was a gold band and worn and obviously old. Hilario picked it up and felt it and looked at it a long time, and handed it back to Tio. "I will not take a man's ring. It has memories. So have I. And now I have a new memory, the honor of knowing a man who has faith in a stranger."

The hotel owner motioned his friends into a huddle and they emptied their pockets and the owner counted out five hundred

pesos and covered the bet. He held the rest of the money in his hand. Hilario pushed his box to the side of the table. I don't know if he had more money in there or not. I just knew they were not going to bluff that fellow. If there was no more money, then there was his *cantina* and his house, and his land and the land of his friends.

Everything was set again and we chose our peppers—this time the yellow ones—greenish yellow, and hotter than the reds. I got by my first one and was on a yellow fury when I felt the sweat ooze out on the back of my neck, down under my collar. They couldn't see it. I was hurting, the numbing burn of piperine, which is a crystalline alkaloid that tightens the tissues like wet rawhide. Each minute got longer, and the tortillas didn't help much.

Next Hilario reached for the green ones—the busters. So did I, and the heat seared down to my belly, and I straightened quickly to stave off a cramp.

I made it through the terrors and the infernos, but Hilario was in visible agony. He was blowing hard the breath and sweat was rolling from under his chin and down his neck. There was consternation among the Indians and jubilation among the Ladinos. Hilario spread his hands on the table, his fingers wide, and blinked at me and the tears flowed.

He managed to smile. "They are hot, sir."

"They are hot." I smiled too.

We had gone through the cayennes and I was hoping that the thing was over, and was willing, even anxious, to settle for a draw.

Hilario, though, took a deep gulp of beer and wiped his eyes and nodded to Nena. She hurried across the patio and came back with a little bowl, and in it were two little peppers. The Ladinos began jabbering excitedly and the Indians moved closer. Nena put the peppers on the table and I got a good look at them.

Amomum meleguetal! I had never seen a whole one before. The spice trade calls them Guinea peppers. Such little nuggets

launched armadas in the old days, sails from Spain and Portugal. Men died for those peppers as for gold and glory. They are the hottest things that grow and their seeds are praised as the grains of paradise.

Hilario studied me for my reaction, and then he said, "You have seen such before?"

"No. Only the seeds."

"They are the grains of paradise. I raise them."

"They are hot."

"You say. And I tell you, for I will be fair with you, I never before have eaten a whole one. At one time. Only the nibble."

"This will end it," I said.

"This will end it. I will wait two minutes for the sip."

"And I will wait two minutes for the bread."

We rested a spell, relaxing in an armistice, and I glanced over my shoulder to catch Tio's eye and to reassure him, but he was looking at Nena. Hilario loosened his collar and pulled his shirt wide open and reached out and picked up one of the peppers. I took the other. We put them in our mouths at the same time and began chewing. The heat jolted me. The roof of my mouth corroded and the tissues inside my cheeks contracted like burning cellophane. But I knew I was going to make it—I just knew it.

But Hilario was in contorted misery. His mouth was pinched and he was blowing hard, and then the sweat popped out of his forehead and the tears rolled out of his eyes. He was breathing deeply, like a man who has run a long race. I had him.

I heard the Ladinos muttering their boasts, their *vaunts* of triumph. I saw the Indians and the stricken looks on their faces. They had been beaten again. The mighty had crushed the humble. The meek must remain the downtrodden.

Then I did a crazy thing. I still don't know why, and don't ask me why. I had a minute to go and the heat inside me was wearing off. But I reached over and grabbed a tortilla. The Ladinos yelled out their astonishment and spluttered their wrath. The Indians looked from one to the other, and they could not believe they had won. Hilario was staring at me, probing deep for an

explanation. Then he snatched his bottle of beer and drained it and swished the beer around in his mouth and spat and spat.

The Ladinos turned on Tio and berated him, and he seemed not to mind at all, only looking down at me and across the room at Nena and at the Indians. Then the Ladinos stomped out and left much of their money behind and much of their pride.

"It was too hot," I said to Tio.

"But it was almost over and he was blowing hard the breath."

"I was burning up inside, Chili. Maybe it didn't show, but I was burning up."

He said no more; only shrugged.

Hilario pushed back his chair. "There will be drinks. Beer for all and brandy for those who want it." He walked behind his counter and stood by Nena. "I will drink first, and to my daughter and to my daughter's man, Tio Felipe Ignacio de Fuestes. Only a good man is worthy of the friendship of such a man as Mr. Hoyle."

The Indians nodded their acceptance of the pronouncement and their approval of Tio. He walked from behind me and over to the counter and near Nena, and she raised her eyes from the floor and looked up at him and then down again. He helped Hilario open the beer. Some of the Indians took brandy and we all drank, and then Hilario said, "And now to Mr. Hoyle, who is not a stranger among us. If there is a favor we can do, we do it."

It came to me then. I don't care what has been written or what has been told before, it came to me for the first time, right then. Acid soil. Controlled moisture. A sheltered south slope and the grains of paradise. I had been offered a favor and I asked it: a few of the peppers to remember this day. Hilario was glad to give them to me. He put the *Amomum melegueta* in a paper bag, and I hung around only long enough for another round of drinks, and then I hurried to the hotel and packed. A bus left at twilight and I was on it, heading home.

The first year I planted them in a hothouse and nursed them through. The green nuggets and their seeds of gold. Then I had

enough seed for a patch, and then enough seed for several acres. That's the way it started, and now I know of no place where you cannot buy my peppers or spices from the Hoyle Spice Company. I even ship peppers back to Tabasco, even to Feliz, for there is money in coals to Newcastle if you do it right. I have never been back to Feliz or to Hattiesburg. I have never heard from Tio or from any of them.

Sometimes it bothers me that I let the Ladinos down. We were talking about it just the other day, sitting around my swimming pool. I told this story, and we got to talking about whether I'd done right or wrong. My wife said I'd done right because I'd got Tio and Nena together. Some of the others said I'd been downright noble because I'd sided with the Indians, who had been pushed around so much. A few said that my successful business was proof that I was right, that I was sharp, that I was clever.

However, three of my friends—the three I like best—said I'd done a low-down thing, that I had patronized the humble and had thrown down those who had trusted me. The least I could do, they said, was to go back to Feliz and give them a clinic or a movie house, or something. Someday I might do it. I know such gifts are not deductible, but all the same, I might do it. I just might.

WEDDING RING

By STEWART TOLAND

IT WAS the peddler man made them know how poor a folk they were. Mostly they just drifted, not wanting more than was their lot. Then the peddler man came walking by and opened up his pack.

White ware he carried. Pots and kettles and tin ovens and fry pans, they stuck out all over his back, shining like purest silver, and singing a little silvery song as he swung the pack onto the puncheon floor. The pack was half the largeness of a feather bed, and it rolled out a world of treasures. Needles, and cologne, and red-top boots, and piece goods—red-flannel, and domestic, and calico—and tucking combs and corset stays, and a wedding ring as shining and bright as life should be.

And there was death. Mourning pins and veiling and shrouding, and coffin nails made in little gold crosses, as though just lying under a row of them could point your way to heaven. There was Bibles and butter molds and seed. There was even more than that. Oh, it was an ache to look at all the pretties spread about, and not to have any for your own. Or for the one you loved.

Everence Lile looked and looked. But it was Miss Beth he watched. He saw the things she touched. Tucking combs and a

butter mold—and the wedding ring. She didn't pick them up as if maybe she might be buying; she just felt of them to know what they were like, and that was enough.

She was so small; in all that crowd of folk kneeling round the peddler's pack there wasn't no one as dainty as she. She was like a flower growing there. And her eyes were flowers, too, they were as pale as violets born too late. And she had been born too late. And he had been born too late. For their land and their people was all worked out.

For this place was called the Hungry Hill. And that was what it was. They didn't even wish any more. They just looked to see what it was other folk had, then went back adrift, going out to sit in the sun, and remember how things used to be. No one saying nothing, for there wasn't nothing left to barter with, not even words.

Everyone left but Miss Beth and Everence Lile, kneeling there before that golden wedding ring. They were promised. They were to be married come falling weather if his corn patch made enough to bread them through the winter. So being promised, it seemed almost like that ring was made for them. It was their ring, even though they couldn't have it.

"Miss Beth," Everence whispered, "I would buy that for you if I could. You know that, don't you? And the tucking combs too."

She knew. For she had loved him, and he had loved her, ever since they could remember, though they hadn't never told each other so. Hereabouts love wasn't something you talked on. It was something you knew without knowing it at all. So she smiled at him, and that was answer enough.

The peddler man laid the butter mold in her lap. It was a round pound, and carved deep into the bottom was a woman's hands waiting to take this goodness of the world and mold it the way it should go.

"There's a butter buyer coming to the county seat every Saturday. It wouldn't take too many weeks of butter to buy that golden ring."

"We don't have no cow."

"Then catch you one of the wild ones roaming the far hills and plant you a pasture." He laid a bag of seed in her lap. "You feed your cow up and she'll bring you cash money every week. Cream money and butter money, and everything you could ever want for."

"My ma said that once, long ago, she asked pa to try for milk and butter, but pa wouldn't listen." She laid a scattering of seed in Everence's hand. "I haven't right to ask, but if I did ask for pasture and cows and fine fat chickens, and a way to make us a farm place, would you listen?"

He only stared at the seed in his hand. And he didn't answer. And she said, "I want it should be different for us, Everence. Oh, please, do you think you could make it be?"

Different. But this was a land where people did as their fathers did before them. Their fathers planted grain, until Western grain came to market cheaper than their own. They turned to cattle. And by and by Western beef, juicy and good eating, came, meat every Thursday, and there wasn't no room for hill-ranged beef that had climbed into muscles to make its way. They planted grass to fatten them up. And watched it die. Some mortgaged their homes to make pasture, and watched their homes die too. This wasn't grassland. It was hill land and tree land. But all the trees were cut and gone, and the corn patches were about used up, for the land had grown poor, and the people was poor. There was nothing left. Nothing but their home for a hundred years and more.

And they loved it. Could anyone understand that? Men loving hungry land. They wouldn't go away, even though every year the game was scarcer and the corn bushels fewer, and they ate a little less than they ever had before. Still, it gave them roof against the night. It was home. And the trees were growing again. In twenty-five years the sawmills could come back. That was what they were waiting for—the trees to grow. When that day came there'd be cash money for everyone. Once more in their lives they could have anything they wanted. And maybe

that would be soon enough. But by then all her young life would be gone.

In the Seven Hills of Wisdom a woman's place is keeping her home. It isn't telling a man how to make his way. But she couldn't stop. Not with all those pretties staring at her that she couldn't never have. "It seems like we oughtn't just wait for to-morrow. We ought somehow to help it be a good day. Our folk tried for grass, and failed. But that don't say we couldn't try again, and make crop on it. The seed might be fatter this year, and the sun a warmer goldness."

The peddler man knew about the fathers, and why this hill was so hungry a place. "There's new ways to do. Fertilizers that'll make grass grow even on a tin roof. Now, if you bought yourself some fertilizer—"

Everence Lile flung the seed in his face. "It ain't right," he stormed, "for you to lay all this tempting in our women's way!" And he said what his pa said before him, "These hills wasn't made for grass and milk and butter. They wasn't made for nothing but a home, and for folk to make the most of what little they got, and not try to go against the Hand of God or be above their raising. We been born too late. It's our lot to find our way not easy, and you can't change the things that are to be. There ain't no sense a man goin' to debt just to watch a beast grow poor. Just to lose his land and have no place on this earth to call his own."

He stopped to let the storm within him die, and then he hunted out the only pride they had left. "I got seed that knows this land better than you. I got corn to make my bread, and that's all the prayers says we got coming. Just to give us this day our daily bread."

He turned and went out the door and sat down with the men-folk drifting along in the sun because they and their land was all worked out. Only the bread was left.

Miss Beth tied the sacking fast and laid it and the butter mold down. She curtsied to the peddler man and walked away. But at

the door she turned to look once more. The tucking combs were tortoise-shell with like a great brown wave curling over them. And the gold of the wedding ring was brighter than any gold had ever been. It was like a promise.

"Where," she asked, "do the rich people live who buy these things? Where, peddler man, do you come from?"

"There's rich folk everywhere, and I've walked all the way from the sea."

"It must be they have better land than we." But when she went out the door, it wasn't the land she looked at. It was the people. The old men who were old, and the young men who were old, and the women who were no more than their men made them be. Miss Beth walked to her cabin and the tin trunk, and got out her marriage quilt. It was new-pieced. And folk did tell as how the dream you dream beneath a new-made quilt always comes to be. She had been saving her dream for her marriage night. But maybe this was more important—her young man drifting his life away.

So when good dark came, Miss Beth laid down beneath her new-made quilt. She held the candle close, and looked and looked. All the little stitches made in feather darts, all the little stitches marching to her heart. It was made wide enough for two, and to last a long life. It was made for her marriage and all the years after. It would grow as old as she grew old, and they would be buried together. She wouldn't be afraid to die with it to warm her grave, for all the living she would ever know would be wrapped up in that quilt. Now she was asking just how it would be.

Miss Beth snuffed the candle and closed her eyes. And slept. She dreamt of the sea where the peddler men got their treasures—of brown tortoise-shell waves beckoning in the sun. She dreamt of a man—it was only the darkness of him she saw, and he came to a golden wedding ring, and he seemed to walk on it like it was a golden road. It lay there like a promise. And the dream said that was what it was. It said it wasn't so about her hill, about their being born too late. For no one ever was. For

there was a road to Promise for every man, and for every man somewhere there was a treasure. He only had to search for it and find it. That was what the dream said, as plain as dreams can be. And just then the walking man came to the end of the golden road by the tortoise-shell sea, and he turned and smiled at her. And it was Everence Lile.

It was then she woke. She was frightened, and searching for the morning. It lay between the logs where the chinking had blown out. It lay in her heart, this beginning of a day. And she wondered had she dreamt a dream or had she known it all along —how he had to go away. She cried then.

But when all her tears were gone she went to tell him of the dream. She carried the quilt all down her hill, there where the ferns grew tall as fawns, there where the sunshine slept. It never came in the deepest hollows; this was where the noon shadows lived, falling from the clouds. This was where the water dripped, little rills and laughters of it falling down the cliffs. This was where the mosses hung like jewels from every stone, and where a man never walked alone. All his years, and the years before piled high against his door, like leaves falling from the never-more.

But one of these things that used to be was made of dreams. So she stood in the path and called through the morning mists, "Everence Lile!"

The echoes answered, and the waterfalls. And he came and listened. She didn't tell him of her doubting—that maybe it wasn't a dream at all. The sea was the combs she wanted. The golden road was the ring she wanted. And the man was the man she loved. She knew he wasn't no-count, that wasn't why he drifted along with all the rest. It was only he didn't know what to do. For everything he knew had failed.

She laid the quilt in his arms so he could know the dream was real. "I heard the words as plain as whippoorwills. They said as how no one is ever born too late. That for every man somewhere there is a road to Promise. That on that road for every man there is a treasure. He only has to search for it and find it."

A woman couldn't tell her man when or what to plant or how to make his way, for these were his. His heritage. A man being lord and master. But she could tell him the dream she found in the dark of the night.

A lovely light came over the hollow; it seemed to touch his face, a sort of glowing, as Everence Lile said the words again, "For every man there is a road to Promise. And on that road, for every man there is a treasure." And he was believing it. Because he wanted to. It was not too strange nor hard a thing to do. When all you've known is only something told, it's as easy to believe a dream as that the world is round and old. They both are only something told.

Finally he said, "I think it just might be, and I should like to see if I can find where the Promise waits for me." He smiled on her, so new, so shy a smiling. "I will find my road, and I will turn it round and bring it back to you. Did the dream say that this could be?"

"It didn't say, but every road has many turnings and no road truly ends."

"Except the ones that ride down to the sea."

"I dreamt of the sea. That was where you walked, and when you got there you smiled at me. Maybe that was what the dream was telling me. That you'll find your treasure in the sea."

She only gave him a dream. She didn't know what it was she really gave him. And he didn't know. Not then.

All over the hill, folk stood beside the trail to watch him go. They gave him a poke of journeycake to last a month and a day. They gave him their blessing, and then they let him go into the shadows and the lonely places of their hearts. For they were sure they would never see him again. Not even Miss Beth, who was promised, and had had her promise stole away as she waved good-by to where he had been.

He saw a snowbird beckoning him on. He saw a gray fox sitting on a rock. He saw where the bobcat slept.

And the first man he came to, he said, "Can you show me the road to Promise?"

And the man said, "Promise? I ain't never heard of the place." "Maybe it's near the sea."

"Ah, the sea! That's down yonder a thousand miles or more away."

And Everence Lile walked on and out of his Hills. And he met another man, and he said, "Can you show me the road to Promise?"

And the man said, "Promise? I never heard of the place." "Maybe it's near the sea."

"Ah, the sea. I saw a sea gull once. It had come from a long ways off. It laid down here and died. Nothing lives well away from its home."

Everence Lile walked on. He saw a phoebe beckoning to him. He saw a moccasin sunning on a bank. He saw flat land without one hill. And houses as tall and white as clouds. And people who had whatever they wished. But nowhere was there a place for him.

He hunted and he hunted, and he was no different than he ever had been. And he was afraid. Maybe men were like turtles, and wherever they went they took their houses and their hungers, and what a man was, he was, and couldn't never change. And then he was even more afraid, and he tried to run from himself.

When an old man sitting by a crossroads called, "Why are you in such a hurry? This day is as long as any other day!"

Everence Lile stopped. "I'm looking for the treasure there is for every man. For me it's near the sea. Do you know where the sea might be?"

The old man and his one tooth laughed, and he pointed down the path. "That's the marsh road, boy, and no one takes it, for it leads only to the sea. And all the treasure you'll find is sand and shells, and the wrecks of ships and men. That's all the treasure there is in the sea. I know. For when I was young I walked that road and I sailed the Seven Seas."

The Seven Seas. He listened to it, and he listened. And he liked the sound of that. And he said, "I come from the Seven

Hills." And it was a magic. The fear died and left his eyes. For where else would the promise be for a boy from the Seven Hills but in the Seven Seas? And he turned and ran down the marsh road, for he had waited so long it was long enough.

He saw a marsh mouse climbing a reed. He saw a bald eagle hunting the curve of a creek. But the sun had set and the sky turned black with silver mists before he came to the loneliness that was the sea. It was a strange smell. And a stranger sound. A hissing and a slithering, like something alive reaching and reaching for what it couldn't never have. And he wondered, *Is the sea like me, reaching for what I won't never have? Is this what the dream was telling about the sea and me?*

He walked over the sand to where the sand was wet, and he watched the waves come and break and crash. They fought each other and themselves, and were no more in the end than they were in the beginning. Clouds ripped and tore at the sky. There was wind up there and rain, and all he could see was the whiteness of the sand and the whiteness of the breaking sea. For hours he walked along the shore, and in all this loneliness beside the water's edge he found less than nothing at all. It was as he said—the roads that ended were the ones that ended in the sea. And here was the sea, and the road was done, and he hadn't found no promise anywheres along it.

Suddenly he was very tired. And he thought of the sea gull and how tired it had been, and it had lain down and died. "No!" he cried. When a strange thought came to him—how even the roads that came to the sea didn't always end. Because you could ask the sea to open and make a way for you. It had before. It was in the Book.

So he stood where the sea and the sea winds were, and he said, "Sea, is there a way for me?"

It didn't gather up in a mighty wave and roll away. But just then those queer, scuddy little clouds that had been flirting across the sky all night danced round behind the moon and let its shine out bright. And it was a wondrous sight. This was wider

than he had known wideness could be. And then he saw the ships out there where there had been blackness before.

One was closer than all the rest. It lay just within a silver path the moon had laid across the sea or the sea had made to hold the moon. It was as plain a road as any road could ever be. He had never seen a ship; he did not know about masts and sails, or waves and worms and rot, and winds loosed upon an ocean. He did not know about the men who sailed the seas. He only knew he had asked the sea for a way, and the way had been shown to him.

Everence Lile stepped into the sea. It was cold. But not so cold as mountain waters even on a summer's day. It tore at him, and then it seemed to help him on his way. He had swam all his life, for the Dark River curled below his hill, and it was swift and cruel and wide. He had never heard of sharks and rays and barracuda, all he'd heard about was whales, so he kept his eyes upon the moon road and he was not afraid.

He swam until his breath was a pain inside, and his arins too heavy to lift. He swam until he saw masts like naked trees against a winter's sky. Two were bare, except for swinging ropes, but the third had a sail spreading white as though a giant cabbage moth rested there. The winds made music in the masts. It was such a lovely song they sang. There was no hint of sadness. No warning to tell him to go away, and he never thought of that, for the silver road came just to here, and laid down on that ship.

There was a lantern burning on the ship, and the sides of it were black, with gold letters. **THE LASSIE** was what they said, but he did not see any of this. Only the figure of a woman rising above him out of the sea. She looked so real. Almost for a moment he thought she was, with her arms outstretched to help him and give him rest. A tangle of ropes hung down beside her and trailing into the sea, and he climbed them and clung there, dripping and shivering and plunging with her and her ship. Because it must be her ship, she was part of it. She was carved of

wood; he could see that now—she was made of wood, and white as milk. Her dress swirled as though it blew with the wind. Her hair was braided round her head. And her eyes—they were Miss Beth's eyes. He looked and looked. They held the same measure of softness and strength. They held the silence and the secrets of the Hills. They were Miss Beth's eyes, as blue as violets born too late. It was very strange.

But his hands were cold and much too numb, and he was so tired. He crawled up the ropes and over and onto the deck. There was no one there. Only a great wheel creaking in its ropes. Only the lantern burning bright. He walked to the small house near the middle of the ship and opened the door.

Smells tumbled out. Such a many and a mixing he could not sort them out. The smell of oil and onions and tobacco and men. Of wood and salt and sweat and rum and rot. And fever. He climbed down the tiny stairs and into a room like he'd never seen before.

Its walls were curved and its ceiling low, and there were round glass windows here and there, and along the walls hung books and boots and coats and ropes and things of brass. There was a great table covered with maps and a book and a gun. There were more things in this room than in all the houses on his hill. There was a lantern hanging from the ceiling sliding to and fro, and its shadow swung with the swing of the ship, and under the lantern there was a great chair, and in the chair there was a man.

He had black shining boots, and black shining pants, and above that he was red and naked as a newborn mouse, save clear across his chest was painted the picture of a ship—a great ship of four masts and near half a hundred sails. His chin hung down against his chest and almost touched the ship. He had a white scraggly fringe of beard like a fallen halo, and eyes as black and dull as rotting plums.

The lantern swung with the swing of the ship, the wood groaned and creaked, and Everence stood and stared, and wondered was the man dead.

And the man stared at this boy dripping on his rug, and finally the fevered lips said, "Are you quick or are you dead? Because if you're quick, I'm glad you've come. And if you're dead, you're not too soon."

"Why would I be dead?"

"Because every seaman is allowed this. He is allowed one vision before he dies. It is always so. When he is deserted by all the living, then the dead rise out of the sea to help. Every man who dies alone upon the sea has this one more chance to talk and dream. You are dripping on my rug, so you are risen out of the sea. You are the dead come to help where all help has gone."

"I am living." He held his arm. "Here, pinch me for yourself." The seaman pinched, and pinched hard, and Everence laughed, "I am not made of oak or stone or jewels that you can pinch so hard."

"Jewels!" The man rose out of his chair in his fury. "That is why I sit like this! That is what my crew took—all the China silk and all the ivory and amethyst and jadel! Thieves and mutineers and murderers! They went away to make themselves rich, and left me to die alone!" He sobbed. "I would have stopped them, but I could not reach my gun! I could not walk!"

Everence gentled him into the chair. "Where is there water and onions? I will make you a poultice."

The black eyes wavered and wandered and were not sure. "Are you really living or are you only my dream?"

"I am living."

"Then where is your ship? We must get to it while there is time."

"Time for what?"

"For living. What kind of a sailor are you that you have not noticed the glass?"

"I am no sailor. I have never before seen a ship or even seen the sea. I swam here. I was so tired I almost wished to die just to give me rest, but there was a sea gull died once far from home, and he would not let me rest. Now I am here where I was

meant to be. I know it's so because the sea laid a path just especially for me."

The old man listened to the wind. "Boy, there's a cork ring; take it and swim for shore. It won't matter how tired you are; the ring will carry you. The cold would kill me, and it's easier to die on my ship, but there might be time for you to reach the land before the sea turns upside down."

"Why should the sea turn upside down?"

"Because that's a barometer there, and it tells of a great storm that is nearly here. Because without a crew to sail *THE LASSIE*, she won't ride it through. She'll be sunk, and everything aboard her."

Everence Lile touched the barometer with its needle and its glass, and the winds painted on its face. He looked at the old man so red with fever. Everence found a barrel of water and smelled out the onions. He made an onion poultice and he made an onion tea.

And the old man said, "Go, boy. You do not know how deep is the sea. Go while there's time. The dead will come and care for me."

Everence picked up the cork ring and went into the night. The wind cried in the masts. All the music was gone. It was crying there now like the world was lost. And the water, from here, was mean and black. Looking at it, he could know how deep was the sea. He could save himself, but what would he save? Someone who'd left a man in mortal trouble. He, who knew how sad and lonely a place was trouble. Besides, it couldn't be. The sea was too large; nothing could turn it upside down. It was the fever made the man talk so of his doom. The fever was the danger, not a storm.

He went back down the stairs and watched the barometer fall. Every now and then he changed the poultice, and the old man woke enough to drink, and then he'd sleep again. He cried in his sleep. He said his name was Captain Noah. He said he would be glad to rest.

Everence listened to the wind, and he listened to the waves.

It's a strange sound waters make when pounding at a wall. A thumping, like a heart that has lost its beat. And then suddenly it was more than that. The waters were a pounding and a crashing and a hissing, not only at the sides of the ship but clear across the top. He clung to the wall and watched through a window, and he saw the sea rise to bury the ship.

It was green. Green water up there where the sky should be. The sea was turning upside down. It seemed to come so slowly, as though it hadn't quite made its mind how devouring a thing it should be.

And then the waters fell. The ship shuddered with it, and screamed, and pitched down and down. And then somehow staggered up again. And he was alive, with life enough left to live this over. And over again.

He turned from the window and clung to the table that was nailed fast. The chair had crashed against it, and Captain Noah was awake.

"You did not go," he said. "Didn't you believe me?"

"Not at first. And when I did, still I would not go. I couldn't leave you to die alone. Most especially when it was my fault. The storm, I mean. I brought it."

And Everence Lile, with the waters and the winds and the ship screaming around them and the lantern flickering like their lives, told how he was born too late, after all the good things were used and gone.

"The sea made a road for me as plain as any road could be. But at the end of the road a storm is waiting for me. It must be it came along with me, for we on the Hungry Hill were born to misfortune. It must be no matter how far you run, you cannot change the things that are to be."

"You could have changed this. You didn't have to stay and die. You could have run from the sea and left the storm behind you."

"Could I? Or would the storm have gone with me?"

They waited. There wasn't anything else to say.

A green sea came, so great and terrible a one the hooks

popped off the walls and the coats and cloaks flung out and around like lost souls, and down to join the stew of things rolling on the floor. And they heard the scream of a mast as it split and crashed to the deck.

"She's breaking up," Captain Noah said.

"I wish I could live," Everence whispered. "I wish I could live long enough to say good-by. For now they won't never know. They might even think I've forgot." He watched his shadow. "If only men were big as their shadows hanging on a wall, then I could take this ship and ride it through the storm." He begged, "Isn't there something we could do? Some secret you have learned in all your years that would help us ride it through?"

"There are no secrets and there's nothing we can do. And I am old and I am tired, and it's taking too long for me to die."

They sat there waiting from this wave to the next, to the time when there wouldn't be any more. Everence crawled to the window and watched, and in the morning he saw the white lady with her arms outstretched as though to give him rest. He said, "Your lady is like someone I love. There's such a pleasantness about her lips, and a softness to her eyes, and strength."

"She was carved for my wife. And my wife was a wonderful woman." Captain Noah sat there smiling at things that used to be, as he waited for the waves to break up his ship.

Everence Lile looked at the lady. And the strangest stirring stirred within him. For it seemed as if she spoke. And the words she said were, "Why are you dying?"

She hadn't said them at all, not with wooden lips. It was the way her arms were made, the way she dipped into the waves and pushed them away from her ship. As if all by her lone, if she tried long enough and hard enough, she could push all the Seven Seas away.

He looked at his own arms. And he knew he wasn't dying because he believed in a thing so much as to set it right. He wasn't setting anything right. A drowned man was as dead as one with lung fever. So he wasn't dying to save a life. He was dying be-

cause he wasn't doing nothing at all. He hadn't held up one hand against the storm, because a man who should know had said there wasn't nothing to be done. And he believed him. Like he'd believed his pa and his grandpa, and all the years before him.

He stared at Captain Noah, and he knew they were both alike—the man from the Seven Hills and the man from the Seven Seas. Drifting along the tide of things that are to be, and finding less than nothing at all. He looked at the white lady pushing at the seas. He heard Miss Beth telling him a dream.

He said, "Captain Noah, what if your lady wasn't just carved of wood and out there drowning in the waves? What if she was in here, living still? Would three be enough to sail your ship?"

"The masts are gone. Haven't you counted them as they fell? And how would we hold the wheel with green seas breaking over our deck? I am too old and you are too young, and my wife weighed ninety pounds."

"Then we would wait to drown. Is that what she would let you do?"

He didn't answer. They crouched there, clinging to the table, as the ship dropped out from under them. For that was the way it seemed. And without knowing it at all, Everence knew they had come in the trough of a terrible wave. And he said, "This is the beginning, and the end of me." And when the waters struck, it seemed the ship must split in two.

Everence screamed at Captain Noah, and he pointed to his chest, "This is the ship that is going to drown—the one you loved enough to paint upon your flesh!" He snatched at the flesh as though he would rip it off. "And your lady, all that's left of her, your pretty white lady, will rot and never see the day again! And for this I am deserting you!"

He pushed his lips against the old man's ear and screamed against the storm, "You are alone! All the living have deserted you! You said the dead would take your care! I leave you to the dead! You said every man who dies alone upon the sea has a

vision, one more chance to talk and dream! And she's come! I've heard her knocking at the door!" He listened and he looked. "She's come to tell you how to save her ship! For it is her ship! You hear? It isn't yours to drown, it is her ship! And she knows the way!"

He crouched there, weeping, beside Captain Noah. "What is it she says? I cannot understand. She loves you, and she loves her ship, and it is to you she speaks. What is it would she do to save you both? All I can understand is that she has come to help you try again."

Captain Noah looked round the cabin, and saw no one. He listened, and heard only the voice of the storm. He stared at this boy from nowhere, and wondered what it was he knew. He said, "She loves me? You think she loves me still? How can she when she's dead, and only made of wood?"

"Her ship lives, and her husband, and they are a part of her. And when part of you is living, how can you be dead?"

They sat there staring at each other, and looking worlds and worlds away. And Everence said, "You didn't hear her speak, but if you had, what was it would she say? What way would she find for you?"

Captain Noah remembered. "It's something sailors do when sailing round the Horn. We did it once long years ago, in a night of storm when all seemed lost. We were young then, and not ready yet to die. Almost I had forgot. But I think she would remember this. It is better than nothing at all. She would tell me to make oil bags and hang them in the rigging."

They did. They sewed sailcloth bags large enough to hold a quart or even two, and filled them full of oil. Every bit of cloth and every bit of oil there was in the cabin and its lockers. And with the sail needle they punched holes so the oil dripped out like a silent rain.

They tied rope about Everence's waist, and they opened the cabin door between the crashing seas, and he clung and he was pounded and near drowned. The water was like mountains

crawling all around. But he hung the bags in the twisted rigging, and with his arms plunging in the icy waters, he thought of the white lady pushing at the Seven Seas as though all by her lone she could push them away. He tied himself to a broken mast and watched the oil pour out on those troubled waters. And all around the ship, little by little, a calmness came. It was very strange.

And the troubled waters within him grew still and ebbed away. And Everence Like knew they would never rise again. For he had found his road to Promise and his treasure in the sea.

And he brought it home, this thing that had never been away. He came to Miss Beth's door, and in the dooryard he tied a cow and her calf. And the sourwood sled they pulled piled high with bags of fertilizer—the kind that would make grass grow even on a tin roof. And on her door stone he laid a box of chicks and a butter mold and a bag of seed. He laid all the things she'd asked, if she asked for, would he listen.

Miss Beth opened her door and stood there in the sun. In good time he'd tell her of Captain Noah and the cash money he'd given to Everence for saving his ship. When he hadn't. Everence knew he hadn't saved it at all. It was a woman's hands. It was a man having a woman so deep in his heart he knew the things he didn't know at all.

Everence said, "Miss Beth, I found the road to Promise."

She stroked the cow and the little red calf. She read the printing on the fertilizer. She knelt and held the chicks and the butter mold with a woman's hands carved deep into the bottom to take the goodness of the world and mold it the way it should be. She opened the bag of seed and found tucking combs. Tortoise-shell with like a great brown wave above them.

"I found my treasure in the sea." He knelt before her. "I found it wasn't a dream you gave to me. It was only the will to try again. That was the treasure I found in the sea. That a man with a woman living deep in his heart can know the things he doesn't know, and do the things he cannot do, for she will help

him try again, even though it seems there ain't no use. And that, I reckon, is treasure enough for any man."

And Everence Lile dipped into the bag of seed and brought out a golden wedding ring as bright and shining as life should be. And she smiled on him. And that was answer enough.

UNINVITED

By CHARLES TAZEWELL

ONE may sit in the great Plaza of Eternity for a thousand and one years as time is measured by men—but which is no more than a lazy summer afternoon in the Celestial City—listening to wondrous stories that delight and charm the ear and which, by comparison, swiftly reduce the fabulous tales of Scheherazade to their true *status quo* of early Arabic pulp fiction.

Although it is situated in the old and original part of the city, many believe the Plaza to be the most beautiful spot in all Paradise. A full half of its magnificent perimeter is dominated by the massive Gates, hand-wrought before time was born by the Proprietor of the Celestial City and justly eulogized throughout the passing centuries in hymn, folk song and literature.

From its remaining half circle and extending fanwise to such far-flung environs as the Elysian Fields, Fiddlers' Green and the Happy Hunting Grounds, sweep the broad avenues of Creation, Justice, Mercy, Compassion—and, of course, the most talked about, thought about, dreamed about street in all the universe—the one which is unique in its strange and unexpected turnings—the winding Street of Miracles.

There is a story that is often told in the Plaza concerning the establishment at Number 10 on this Street of Miracles. The main

building is of wood, a great oddity in the Celestial City, and is completely dwarfed by a series of huge annexes which appear to have been added from time to time in a most eccentric and unorthodox manner. The construction is decidedly crude and patently amateurish. It is a down-at-the-roof, crooked-at-the-beams, paint-bare building that should hang its head in shame as it stands there in the shadow of the majestic Hall of the Recording Angels and the imposing High Court of the Patriarch Prophets. On the contrary, there is a proud note in every creak of its ancient timbers; there is jovial laughter in every rumble of its old boards—for Number 10 knows that it is the most loved building in Paradise.

There might not be a Number 10 if it hadn't been for a cherub named Michael. He was eight-year size and he came trudging manfully on his short legs up the Golden Stairs one day—pausing now and then for a troubled, tear-damp backward glance over his shoulder—to present himself for admittance at the great Gates.

This Michael bore not the slightest resemblance to all those well-behaved, dimpled cherubs who have flown so fluently from the brushes of the great masters. Indeed, at children's parties in whatever his earthly neighborhood, many a worried hostess must have watched him crash-dive on a keepsake and heirloom and mentally voted him the one most likely to become an imp.

His caroty hair was as cowlicked as a salt block in a pasture; to have counted his freckles on his snubnosed face would have been as hopeless a task as tallying the stars in the Milky Way; his nervous fingers betrayed his rating of take-aparter first-class, who could quickly and permanently disassemble anything from a catapult to a mousetrap; each toe was a lodestone which could attract every mote of dust, every grain of sand and every droplet of mud, to hold for deposit upon the first clean surface.

The good Gatekeeper, with one kindly eye on his Book of New Arrivals and one suspicious eye on Michael, recorded the name—and watched the cherub sidle into Paradise with that stiff-legged gait which small boys use when entering a new and

possibly unfriendly alley. A moment later he gave a cry of dismay. Somehow, in spite of his watchfulness, the newcomer had contrived to scratch his initial on one of the great Gates.

Since Michael had no relatives then in residence in the Celestial City, he was taken to the Angels' Aide, which was and still is on the Avenue of Compassion at Third Millennium Circle. Any cherub placed in its care was indeed fortunate—because it had always been managed by a large corps of elderly grandmothers, well-remembered at some former earthly address for their overindulgence of their own grandchildren. Then, too, from its very beginning, this cherub shelter had always been under the direct supervision of one who loved and understood children—the only Son of the Proprietor of the Celestial City.

Michael liked his new home; he adored all the grandmothers; and he tolerated the other cherubs. It might be said, and truly said, that he was most agreeable and angelic—if we disregard the minor riot he caused when they tried to get him into a cherub's robe which had no pockets and which he declared was sissy. It took the grandmothers only four days to catch him—and when they showed Michael that the robe now had two large pockets sewed onto the back, he was almost seraphic about it in a grim sort of way.

And the week-long feud that he had with old Japheth, of the Halosmith Guild, is hardly worth recording because he ruined less than a smith's dozen of halos. Japheth and Michael became the closest of armed friends as soon as the stubborn Japheth grudgingly admitted that a boy's halo had more character if it was worn over the right ear and bent a bit to hide one eye.

At first, when Michael went strolling about the Celestial City—his wing tips thrust belligerently into the back pockets of his robe, his battered and limp halo hung on a red cowlick and a hasty prayer, his shrill and tuneless whistle clearing the way as efficiently as Joshua's trumpet did at Jericho—he was the cause of much headshaking by the oldest archangels. They watched him turn cartwheels down the Avenue of Creation to impress a group of small girl-cherubs; they observed him sliding down the

rail at the Museum of Antiquity and shouting "Whee-e-e!" instead of the more approved "Hallelujah!"; they saw him use his wings for a towel, whisk broom, handkerchief, penwiper and halo-shiner—and they sadly shook their beards and whispered that they didn't know what the younger generation of cherubs was coming to!

In time, however, since his coming seemed not to have shortened eternity by a single hour, Michael was accepted by everyone in the Celestial City as a genuine, albeit unconventional cherub.

Michael was a born explorer and, although the city covered a far greater area than time itself, his knowledge of its streets, avenues, boroughs and subdivisions soon outmatched that of the earliest citizen and was second only to the Proprietor's. He could recite the names of all the long-lost ships that had found safe harbor with their crews at Fiddlers' Green; he knew the day and hour when the myriad campfires out at the Happy Hunting Grounds were kindled, forming clouds of aromatic smoke to bring the earth its Indian summer; he could walk blindfolded along any path through the Elysian Fields.

Michael's favorite place, however, was discovered quite by accident. Indeed, only a very few even knew of its existence, because it stood on a narrow and forgotten lane that ran alongside the great Wall in the oldest part of the city. It was named Eden Way and only a boy-cherub would have bothered to explore it; only a boy-cherub such as Michael would have been attracted to the square, cavernous building which stood at its end—and which bore the simple, utilitarian name, The Stables.

Time was—oh, many long years ago—when The Stables had been filled with tumult and commotion. That was when the earth had been very new and its early settlers much perplexed because never before had they had a planet to manage. At all hours, huge chariots had rocketed out of The Stables, massive wheels rolling thunder and the hoofs of their fearsome steeds striking lightning, as they carried the Word of the Proprietor of the Celestial City down to the groundlings.

Now the earth was old. Now the great chariots stood idle and their fearsome steeds grew fat and lazy. Brawny Shard and his audacious crew of chariot drivers drowsed in the warmth of the eternal day; rousing now and then to snap at stones with whips which once had snapped at stars; wishing for a pair of new, receptive ears as bottomless as the Big Dipper into which to pour their stories of the good old days. Michael became their pet, their jewel and the cherub of their eye when they discovered that he had ears as fathomless as space and as absorbent as sponges.

Lying on the broad back of one of the awesome steeds while Shard polished a hoof, he would say, "Shard, do tell again how you carried the warning to Lot just before the Proprietor destroyed the wicked towns of Sodom and Gomorrah!" Or to boisterous Crag, who allowed Michael to ride with him in one of the rumbling chariots when he drove outside the great Gates to exercise a stamping team, "Crag—tell once more about the time that you drove the Proprietor, Himself, down to Mount Sinai to give Moses His commandments!" And to jovial Shale, while Michael helped him at soaping and polishing the intricate harness, "Please, Shale, it's my favorite story! Tell about the night you drove the angel down to Judaea to tell the shepherds that the Proprietor's Son had been born in Bethlehem!"

One evening, when they were sitting in front of The Stables, the air sweetly perfumed by the night-blooming Cirrus clouds which clung ivylike to the great Wall, Michael heaved a small cherub sigh and asked, "Shard? Shard—what's your most favorite animal?"

"What size animal?" countered the practical Shard.

"Oh, about the size of a dog. With a tail like a dog. And ears like a dog."

"Well—if it looked that much like a dog, I'd call it a dog and I guess a dog would be my favorite," answered Shard.

"I wish," Michael said after a moment—"I wish I had a dog."

"Not allowed here," announced Crag.

"Who said so?" demanded Shale.

"Never has been one," said Crag. "And you know it."

"That doesn't signify!" cried Shale. "I leave it to Shard—all of us have been here right from the beginning—has the Proprietor ever said one word about no dogs?"

"No," Shard said judiciously, "not that I recollect."

"There you are, then!" bellowed Shale. "Now—the boy wants a dog. Why don't we get him a dog the next time we take a team out for exercise?"

"Who's arguing against it?" demanded Crag.

"Tomorrow's my day to drive," rumbled Shard.

"It's my day!" argued Shale.

"We'll all go!" decided Crag. "Any nitwit can select a robe, because it only needs to fit the outside of a boy. A dog, however, has to fit him outside and inside, and that requires mature thought and judgment!"

The dog of their choice would have been scorned by the average man or the average angel. It had a crook in its tail—but as Shard pointed out, the tail had such a friendly-frantic wag the defect would never be noticed. One ear stood up while the other ear hung down—but as Shale demonstrated, this really was a great blessing, because it gave the lucky animal not one—but two-dimensional hearing. Its coat was the tarnished brass of a sickly goldfish—but as Crag declared, it was a nice, compromising, neutral shade which was exactly right for the Celestial City, because it could never offend any race, creed or color. As for Michael, he was far richer in dog than Croesus ever had been in gold, and although occasionally he had been remiss about his evening prayers, he now meticulously thanked the Proprietor every night for having envisioned and created anything as marvelous as a dog!

After much thought and discussion, the pampered newcomer was christened Exodus, because, like the Israelites, he had journeyed out of one place into another. Once again The Stables was filled with tumult and commotion—and those passing the entrance to Eden Way often paused to listen to the booming guffaws of heavy voices, the joyous laughter of a child; or scratched

puzzled heads with thoughtful wing tips at another sound which never before had been heard in the Celestial City, the shrill, cracked, voice-changing barking of Exodus.

As the planets revolved around a yellow sun, so did Michael's day revolve around a yellow dog. In the morning, there was the romp all over The Stables and up and down Eden Way; in the afternoon there were trips, with Exodus safely concealed under his robe, out to such far places as Valhalla, where cataracts of rainbows fell from towering cliffs to shatter on the rocks below and send their fragments streaming down to earth—or out to incredibly beautiful New Jerusalem, to which everyone in the Celestial City had contributed a tree, a flower, a brook or a winding lane from his dearest memory of childhood; in the evening there was the snuggling in the straw at The Stables with Exodus' heart thudding hard against his—and coming sweetly to the ear, the song of Shard and the other drivers:

*Roll, you wheels!
Snap, you whip!
Race, you steeds, at your fastest clip!
Haw to the left—
Gee to the right—
Got to get the Word to the
Ishmaelite. . . . !*

This ideal routine might have gone on forever if it hadn't been for the singing practice. It had been the custom for more than a thousand centuries to close the great Gates during the six days which immediately preceded Easter, and all movement in or out of the Celestial City during this period was through a small, plain gate of blackest ebony under the famous Stairs. Then, on Easter Morning, to symbolize the fulfillment of the promise of the Proprietor of the Celestial City to His Only Son, the great Gates were thrown open. Everyone had some part, large or small, in this ritual of rejoicing; and Michael, as a member of the cherub choir, was called for rehearsal.

He was on time for the first rehearsal by only the thickness of

the slight tarnish on his halo, because it had taken him so long to say good-by to Exodus, to admonish the drivers not to let him out of The Stables, and to give full instruction on what to do in case of any emergency such as a strain in his bark or a sprain in his tail. The cherub choir practice was not much of a success that day. In every song, Michael's voice was decidedly off key and Michael's mind was definitely on dog.

The jubilant reunion that evening could have been equaled only by Damon and Pythias if they had been separated for half a lifetime by war, famine and pestilence. Shard, Shale and Crag, who had proved themselves to be consummate dog watchers, swaggered modestly under Michael's praise, while Exodus employed a pink tongue to wash each freckle, erasing every foreign odor it had gathered during the day so that Michael would again smell like The Stables.

The next morning, reassured by the outcome of the day before, Michael dashed out of Angels' Aide, darted down Eden Way to say good-by to Exodus, and then raced off to singing practice—arriving with a full split second to spare. Of all cherub faces, his was the shiniest. Of all cherub voices, his was the lustiest. Of all cherub scents, his was the doggiest.

The person or object responsible for the first link in a chain of unhappy events which later led to catastrophe has never been irrefutably ascertained. Shale put the blame on a defective latch. Crag put the blame on a defective staple. Shard put the blame on both their defective heads. Whatever failed or whoever was at fault, the gate of The Stables stood three inches ajar and Exodus wiggled out.

Reading Michael's footsteps up Eden Way was an easy task for Exodus' young, primary-grade nose, but when he arrived at the Plaza of Eternity, where every day thousands on thousands passed, he lost the trail. He hopefully examined the steps of the Library of the Archangels; he anxiously sniffed the doorstep of the High Court of the Patriarch Prophets; he frantically inspected every inch of the curb in front of the House of the Guardian and Trustful Angels; his fear turned into dread and

his dread into terror as he minutely nosed the entrance to the Museum of Antiquity and found no trace of Michael's feet.

At this moment, a passer-by noticed him and bent down to pat him, and Exodus, legs trembling and suddenly remembering unkind hands of earlier days, shied away and gave a shrill bark of alarm. This sound, never before heard in the Plaza of Eternity, caused every head to turn—and then, because the people who lived in the Celestial City were much like the people who lived in any city, everyone hurried across the Plaza to assume the role of the curious bystander.

Exodus, finding himself surrounded by this host of strangers, cowered and whimpered. Then, with courage born of panic, he snarled a vicious string of mongrel growls, threw himself at the forest of legs, slithered through to freedom and went bolting down the Avenue of Creation! It was blind, unreasoning flight. The voices behind him and those along his way which called to him only added to his fear and he went faster and faster until he was a yellow comet with a yellow tail flying through the Celestial City.

He made a shambles of Halosmith Road—scattering the workers like chaff—toppling the towering piles of golden circlets which went rolling and bouncing off into infinity! Centuries hence they would confound the earthlings, who, with bated breath, would tell their awe-struck tales of saucers flying past.

He left chaos behind him in the bazaars on Robemakers Lane. Just before his arrival, a whisper as fast and as darting as a hummingbird had sped down the street—a hound of hades, breathing fire and brimstone, was loose in the Celestial City!

Upon the appearance of this satanic emissary, every seamstress swooned or had hysterics, and league on league of finest weaving of every rainbow hue went streaming off into space! A thousand years from then, when it had been woven into tapes-tries by the four winds, the groundlings would ask their men of science to explain the season's sunsets of unearthly beauty.

Exodus was outmaneuvered and brought to bay in the Street of the Wingmakers by a company of Avenging Angels, the most

feared and implacable soldiers of all time. In an instant, they could destroy a city; in a week, they could starve a nation with hordes of locusts or other insects; in a month, they could decimate a continent with plague; in forty days and forty nights, they could drown a planet. Strange to say, these dread avengers were very gentle with Exodus. The ferocious sergeant surprised the onlookers by talking puppy-talk—and the merciless captain, looking neither to right nor left, strode off to the High Court of the Patriarch Prophets with Exodus cradled in his arms.

It was the unanimous decision of the Patriarch Prophets that Exodus was to be banished from the Celestial City at the first hour of the following day, which was the Hour of Correlation when every planet, star, sun and meteor was checked for path and position against the Proprietor's Master Plan of Creation. Until that time, he was to be confined in the old Gatehouse, an abandoned relic of the early days when there had been few arrivals.

The Patriarch Prophets, serene in their belief that the matter of the yellow dog was settled, went on to more important business; but being mere prophets and not the Proprietor, they could not be all-knowing. The next morning, at the Hour of Correlation, the planets, suns, stars and comets were all in their proper places, but there was no Exodus in the old Gatehouse and there was a red-haired cherub missing at Angels' Aide.

The Celestial City was searched street by street and avenue by avenue. Each distant borough was thoroughly combed and every possible hiding place—even though it was as small as a needle's eye—was looked into, but not a red or yellow hair could be found. The elderly grandmothers at Angels' Aide, all of a flutter because never before had they lost a cherub, made their heart-stricken, incoherent report to the Only Son of the Proprietor of the Celestial City.

The Son listened and smiled and nodded His head. Then, unlike all the others, because He has always been very knowing about children, He searched nowhere in the Celestial City for Michael and the yellow dog. When He left Angels' Aide, He

turned and made His way across the Plaza of Eternity, passed through the great Gates and walked slowly down the Stairs. On the bottommost step, scarcely visible in the cold, whirling mists and empty darkness of endless space, He saw a red blob and a yellow blob which appeared to be tightly fused together.

The Proprietor's Son sat down on the step and said: "Would you mind if I petted your dog? I've been standing there admiring him—and do you know that in all my travels, I don't believe I've ever seen such a handsome animal."

"They don't like him—and they don't think he's at all handsome!" The cherub's words were so hushed and tear-soaked that no one but the Only Son of the Proprietor could have heard and understood them. "They're going to send him away!"

"Oh, that's a great mistake," said the Son.

"I won't stay if he has to go!" wept Michael.

"I don't blame you for feeling that way—because I can see that you and this dog are the best of friends." The Son gently stroked the rough yellow fur. "I once had one that was very much like him. Oh, not nearly so fine, of course—but I thought he was beautiful. We met quite by accident. He was a stray that had sought shelter under the same roof where I was born—and when we left that place and went into Egypt, he followed right along at our little donkey's heels."

"What was his name?"

"I called him Caleb. Oh, he was very smart. And when I was a boy in Nazareth, he went everywhere with me and guarded my bed every night." The Son smiled at the memory of long ago. "Now you must tell me how you came by your friend."

The Son listened to Michael's story, gravely nodding His head from time to time. Then, when it was finished, He rose and held out His hand.

"Come, Michael," He said. "Let us go back into the City."

"But if I go back, they'll take Exodus away from me!" cried the cherub.

"Oh, no," said the Son. "Has it not been promised by the Proprietor that all men shall find what they love and cherish in His

Celestial City? And how very blind We have been never to have seen that men would give such a great share of their love to all the small creatures that live with them their days on earth. Ah, what an empty, lonely place Our Celestial City must be for those who believe that the familiar and never-forgotten voice of a furred or feathered friend is more sweet and more harmonious than the sound of all Our angel choirs. Come." He lifted the cherub to his feet. "Come, Michael, we must do something about it, you and I!"

Carrying the cherub in His arms and with a small yellow dog following closely at His heels, the Son of the Proprietor walked up the broad, footworn Stairs and passed through the great Gates.

At all hours, in the busy days that followed, the huge chariots rocketed as of old up and down Eden Way—massive wheels rolling thunder and the flying hoofs of the fearsome steeds striking lightning as they did the bidding of the Proprietor and His Only Son! The frightened earthlings ran into their houses and covered their heads as their sky was slashed into fiery ribbons and trampled into ominous clouds of black dust, and they trembled as the ground beneath their feet quavered and shook and groaned under the mighty laboring of all the Heavenly Host!

When the task was finished, when the last great timber and smallest peg had been found and carried to the Celestial City, there arose on the Street of Miracles, in the shadow of the majestic Hall of the Recording Angels and the imposing High Court of the Patriarch Prophets, the shabby down-at-the-roof, crooked-at-the-beams building which stands there today with its many additions.

The old walls are impregnated with the smell and the warmth of many animals, for here is safely sheltered every small creature that anyone has ever loved and lost. No owner need ever worry about their care or comfort, for in this wondrous place are a man and a woman who were summoned by the Proprietor from their retirement at Elysian Fields and who joyfully resumed the work they knew so well.

Whenever the door at Number 10 opens and a new visitor appears, there is instantly an excited chorus of barks, meows, chirps, squeaks and chattering. Suddenly, from somewhere—perhaps the farthest corner—there comes a sharp, ecstatic and almost hysterical cry which rises high above all the others. The ear and the heart then know that the long lost is lost no longer.

Number 10 is very easy to find. In the Plaza of Eternity will be found a red-haired cherub and a yellow dog. Following the robe with the pockets in the back and the wagging tail with a crook in it, the newcomer will arrive in no time at all at the famous Ark of Captain and Mrs. Noah at Number 10 on the Street of Miracles.

THE WARMHEARTED POLAR BEAR

By ROBERT MURPHY

WHEN Whitey, the young polar bear, wandered disconsolately around the vaguely familiar headland and saw the berg-dotted expanse of Foxe Basin stretching away to the south and the shapes of the two offshore islands in front of him, he knew for once where he was. He knew exactly, and pain stabbed him; for he had stood on this same spot, a year ago, wailing in anguish as the icebreaker Bonaventure so callously sailed off and left him alone. He remembered, as clearly as though it were yesterday, coming back from a little spring exploring trip inland and staring at the empty expanse of water where the ship had lain, frozen in since the autumn before. At first he hadn't believed his eyes; he had taken for granted that she would always be there; and then, far off, he saw her masts slowly diminish in size and finally disappear.

It had been a dreadful time, and the year that followed was more dreadful still. He had to learn the hard way that a polar bear's life was a matter of keeping ahead of two things: the ice and starvation. The two were closely related, for most of the arctic's life existed around the edge of the floe, and he had to follow the life if he wanted to dine upon it. In summer he had

to go north and in winter come south again, walking until he thought his feet would drop off. In summer, clouds of insects nearly drove him mad and, in winter, cold congealed him to the marrow; he had to swim a great deal, and he was a little afraid of water; there was either too much daylight or none at all. And while he was living high and effortlessly on handouts, the prey he was soon to stalk was growing up learning how to avoid him. It was amazing how good they'd got at it.

All these things were bad, but the fact that he had to scramble for himself and the eternal lonely boredom were worse. For a time after they'd shot his mother and dragged him, squalling, back to the ship, he'd fought and sulked and swung at everything; but he had a cub's ravenous hunger and a cub's curiosity, and he'd learned with phenomenal quickness that hostility made for an empty belly and that men were entertaining creatures as well as pushovers for a cute act. Properly handled, the captain's wife was always ready to pet him, and the crew was always ready for games or wrestling matches. There were endless things to upset or take apart; they all ruined his palate with cooked meat and sweets, softened him up with warm places to sleep, developed his ear for harmony with accordion music, taught him to dance in a clumsy, shuffling fashion, and indoctrinated him with the notion that life was an endless, heedless picnic so long as he behaved himself and looked cuddly. Then they went off and left him with nothing but darkness, cold, trouble, hunger, monotony and the horrid crashing and roaring of the ice.

When he recalled these things—the captain's wife, the bearded young Frenchman, Armand, and his accordion, and all the rest of it—he was filled with moral indignation, and then rage. On the anniversary of their perfidy he gave way to his feelings, roaring, throwing the cold rocks around and tearing up everything within reach.

Later that afternoon, hoarse and weary from his tantrum, he sat down on the cold rocks, stared at the basin, empty of everything except frigid water and rotting ice, and considered his prospects for the future. He had often tried to do this before,

but he wasn't the concentrating type and his mind soon wandered off the subject. This time he was more disgruntled than usual and managed to stay on the subject a little longer; long enough, at least, to decide that he should get out of the country, as his friends on the Bonaventure had done. There must be, he thought with an unusual flowering of logic, a better place to the south if they went there; food must be easier to come by, the way they treated it, and there was probably plenty of warmth and music. He might even see them again, especially the captain's wife or Armand.

When he reached this point he began to get restless, for he had thought a lot already, and the questions of how to get south without walking and how to eat on the way were complicated and the answers were singularly elusive. It made no difference whether he approached them directly or tried to creep up on them in a roundabout way; they failed to develop, and presently, weary of it all, he decided to think some more on another day, and got up and wandered up the shore.

An hour or so later, muddy and wet from all the swollen streams he had crossed, he saw a spot of white far ahead and watched it for a time. It was moving; it vanished and reappeared among the rocks and, making sure that the wind was right, he turned inland to get a look at it from cover. He had encountered several old he bears in his wanderings, and wanted no more of them, for they invariably took a dislike to him at sight and he'd had to put his best foot forward to get away from them. His dimly remembered mother, and the captain's wife, gave him more hope for females.

Some careful maneuvering and the wind settled the question; it was a she bear, and with her scent was combined the delectable smell of seal. She had meat. Whitey started for the beach at a lope. The she bear and her seal were near the water, and she stopped eating and looked up as he paused a few feet away. Her expression was alert and noncommittal, but at least there was no immediate hostility in it. Whitey lowered his head and

wagged his rear; he had often ingratiated himself in such a fashion with people, and he hoped it would work again. The she bear looked at him, still chewing, but when he wagged even harder, she stopped chewing and stared at him with increasing doubt and puzzlement.

Neither of them said anything. The she bear stared at him for a moment longer, grunted and fell to eating again. Whitey began to drool; still wagging, he inched a little closer, stretched out his long neck and licked up a little blood. The she bear looked indecisive; most of the gentlemen she knew would have cuffed her off by this time and had the seal. The taste of blood made Whitey tremble with anticipation; and, very slowly, he moved a little closer still, rolled up his eyes beseechingly at the she bear, and then got his teeth into a corner of the meat. This brought the she bear to a decision; she took a sudden, full-armed swing and caught him on the ear.

He sat up with his head ringing, six feet away, and looked groggily at the she bear. She was eating again, and there wasn't much left. Things hadn't gone the way he'd expected, but he wasn't finished yet. He looked very pathetic and began to whimper.

"Please," he moaned. "Please give me some. I'm starving."

"You don't look starved to me," the she bear said, between bites, "nor crippled either." She gestured toward the basin. "Go on out there and help yourself. There are plenty more where this came from."

Whitey collapsed on the beach and whimpered more loudly. "I can't catch them!" he wailed. "I never learned how. I'm an orphan—a poor deserted orphan—and I'm hungry."

He began to inch forward again. "Stay there," the she bear said, and finished up the seal. She licked her chops and sat up. "Now then," she said. "If the welfare state has arrived, I haven't been advised of it yet. You might have been an orphan once, but it's perfectly obvious that you've been shifting for yourself for at least a year. I'll give you a word of advice: don't try that

cute act on the next bear you meet or you might get your teeth knocked down your throat." She got up, shook herself and started off.

After a momentary hesitation, Whitey started after her. He admitted to himself that he had made a tactical error in handling the matter of the seal, but he was already beginning to have a few other ideas. Flattery, now, was usually useful with females of the age of this one; and besides, he was lonesome.

"And don't try to follow me either," the she bear said over her shoulder. "You look like a juvenile delinquent to me."

Whitey watched her out of sight, and hoped that the next walrus she met would get a tusk into her liver. She was an old haridan, and it was bad luck that he'd happened across her instead of a softer-hearted creature. The memory of watching her eat and the lingering smell of seal had sharpened his appetite to the point where he was willing to face the water to get a meal. With distaste, he got into the basin and swam out among the floes.

He cruised around until he saw a seal asleep on an ice pan; lying close to its escape hole, it awoke every few minutes and raised its head to look about, and he knew that he was too clumsy to get up on the pan unseen and stalk it. He would have to go through the other routine, which he abominated.

He sank lower in the water, until only his eyes and ears showed; when he came to the edge of the pan, he dived under it and swam toward the escape hole. It was dark under the ice, and it gave him horrid feelings of claustrophobia; he paddled his way to the edge of the hole and rapped sharply on the under side of the ice. The startled seal awoke and plunged through the hole. It should have landed in his waiting arms, but he had got out of position somehow, and it wiggled frantically past him and vanished into the dark water.

He made three more tries before he caught one, and by that time he was half drowned and almost too exhausted to eat it. He finally fell asleep before he finished it, and while he slept the little arctic foxes crept in and finished it for him.

When he awoke again and discovered this, he was too depressed to fall into another rage. It was the last straw. He sat for a while looking at the gnawed bones that were left, stood up and started along the shore of the basin toward the south. He didn't know how far he had to go or what he would find when he got there, but he was on his way.

For a day or two, while he moved in the direction the ship had taken, he knew that he was going the right way, but presently, what with the turns and twists of the coastline, he began to have fearful doubts. The long arm of Foxe Peninsula, thrusting out to the west, confused him still more; it didn't seem to go in the proper direction; he spent two days in indecision, running to and fro, trying to decide whether to cross the land or follow the coastline. He finally decided to follow the coast, because he couldn't remember seeing the ship try to get up on land, and so made his way around to the peninsula's western shore.

He would probably have walked all the way around Baffin Island and continued on to the Pole if he hadn't blundered into a party of Cape Dorset Eskimos who were out looking for the wife of one of their number, by name Kikortaloriak, who had disappeared the day before. As Whitey walked out from behind one end of a rock fall at the base of a cliff, the Eskimos appeared from behind the other, about a hundred yards away. Whitey would probably have tried to join them, inasmuch as they were men, but they had a few Huskies with them which started roaring for him as the first rifle bullet sang off a rock close to his head.

It had a malignant and bloodthirsty sound, and if Whitey was still inclined to harbor his delusions after hearing it, the Huskies, pouring over the rocks around him, soon dispelled them. They were big, vicious and hungry, and their single ambition at the moment was to take him apart. They were all over him before he realized what they were; their teeth were long and sharp, and their jaws were capable of cracking caribou leg bones at a bite. They did shield him from more rifle fire, because

the Eskimos were afraid to shoot into the melee, but they were far from an unmixed blessing. Whitey was soon shaken from his hopeful frame of mind, and fighting for his life.

He rolled and roared and raked about him, finally driving them back for a moment; and, as he was facing the water at the time, he ran for it. It was the best thing he could have done, for in the water he soon outdistanced the dogs, and they straggled back to shore. The firing began again and bullets tore up the water about him, but he dived and swam under water and got an ice pan between himself and the Eskimos. He kept going until he came to a great iceberg slowly and majestically moving down the channel.

It was a beautiful thing, long, high and fantastically carved, white on top and lime green and rosy pink along the cleavage planes where it had broken off the mother glacier; he crawled up on it and flopped down to rest. He was lacerated, stiff and weary, and he remembered now that his mother had told him to stay far away from Eskimos. After a while he climbed to the top of a pinnacle of the berg to see if they were following him, but the berg had drifted past them and they were not in sight.

As he thought about them, the evil way they'd treated him and his battle with the dogs, he began to feel a stirring of something akin to pride in himself. At first the feeling puzzled him, for he had never felt it before. He had had many fits of temper, but this affair was different; he had never been attacked and fought back, and he remembered the blows he'd struck with an awakening satisfaction. The more he recalled the fight the more blows he seemed to have struck, and presently, in his mind's eye, he was pursuing a great pack of very large dogs all over the place, knocking them about at will. It was a fine thing, and soon his chest swelled so much that it was almost uncomfortable.

In this pleasant frame of mind he decided to explore the rest of the berg, and set out, mumbling happily to himself. He climbed higher still, to the summit of it, and from there could

see that its shape was roughly rectangular. He was not far from one end, and started for the other.

He stayed on top for a little while, rejoicing in the view and in the fact that he was being taken somewhere at no cost to himself, and then got a bit bored with it. He went down one side and continued along near the water line. That was better; there were many caves and irregularities along the sides, and the waves broke just below him. He found a dead fish and ate it, but its small size brought to his mind the fact that he was hungry. His happy mumble changed a little and became slightly peevish, and his pace picked up. He found no more fish, but as he approached the other end the berg flattened out and suddenly, near the end and not far from the water line, there appeared a most splendid sight—the huge bulks of two dead walruses.

This was eating for a long time to come, and he started at a run for it. He was within fifty yards of the corpses when the figure of an Eskimo moved into sight around one of the walrus' heads; the Eskimo saw him, stopped and stood staring. Whitey also stopped, so quickly that he fell over himself. He bounced up again and stood staring back, shaken and dismayed, and his belly began to yammer desperately at him.

The Eskimo, who was the lost wife, Kikortaloriak, had been left to watch the walrus while the hunting party moved on, and was marooned when the berg broke from the glacier. She shook the skirt of her woman's parka at him in the ancient gesture of peace between women and bears, but Whitey hadn't been instructed in that matter. All he saw was an Eskimo standing between him and the meat; his belly filled his head with its clamor, it knotted and writhed within him, and his caution was overborne by these things and his new warlike picture of himself. He started anew, purposefully, for the Eskimo.

Kikortaloriak had little hope for her life, except to prolong it with the meat. She ran behind the walrus, picked up the heavy

shaft of a spear from which the point had been broken, ran back, swung the shaft and by luck hit Whitey square on the nose with it. He fell over backward; lights exploded before his eyes, and pain filled him all the way back to his tail. He rolled about, howling, and, when the anguish diminished somewhat, retreated farther and presently sat up. Kikortaloriak stood by the walrus, holding the shaft, and for a moment Whitey, seeing the tons of meat once more through his watering eyes, thought of going for her again, with more care. But his head was throbbing, his nose was on fire, and he discovered that his taste for combat had evaporated. He remembered that there were easier ways to get a meal. He moved closer; Kikortaloriak picked up the shaft. Whitey at once abased himself; wagging his rear, he slowly crept closer, and the closer he crept the more rapidly he wagged himself.

Kikortaloriak for a moment was nonplused, but as Whitey rolled up his eyes, panted supinely and eyed the walrus, she got the idea. She had fed Huskies all her life and had often seen such antics. She watched him for a moment, took a knife from her belt and cut him a great wedge of meat. Still wagging now and then, he ate it and sat looking happily at her. Her relief was so great that after a bit she began to sing. She had a voice like a crow, but it had been a long time since Whitey had heard any music. He was ravished by it; he sat for a bit with his head canted and his eyes closed in ecstasy, and then, unable to bear the joy of it quietly, stood up and went into his clumsy, shuffling dance. Kikortaloriak laughed with pleasure and renewed hope, and sang on. When she was tired, she stopped; Whitey sat down again, and they beamed upon each other while the berg moved majestically on.

And so they were carried south by the currents that move out the arctic's ice, through Hudson Strait, out into the Atlantic, down the coast of Labrador and around Newfoundland. The berg slowly diminished as the water warmed, and the walrus diminished with it. Kikortaloriak was content to be drifting

south, having heard in summer camps around Cape Dorset that there were many people in that direction, and Whitey didn't care where he went.

They got on together very well until they came to the limit of drift ice below Nova Scotia, where the current swings east, away from the coast. Kikortaloriak didn't want to go east; she knew vaguely that there was a lot of empty ocean that way; she was determined to go south, and so she became possessed by a minor devil. First she sat brooding, and then she ran about, saying, "*Pin-ung-nak! Pin-ung-nak!*" which means "South! South!"

Then a brilliant idea occurred to her. She took Whitey to the end of the berg, got into the water and began to kick with her feet. She indicated to Whitey that he was to do the same thing. He stared at her, amused, and she began to scream at him. He was amused no longer, and wandered off, whereupon she ran for the spear shaft and pursued him. Whitey finally had to give in and start paddling.

Whatever minute propulsive effort Whitey was able to exert would ordinarily have done nothing but increase his appetite, but an odd and uncharacteristic wind came up. For a time it just equalized the current; and so Whitey's energy, like the fabled straw which broke some camel's back, started them south again.

The wind held, and well out off Nantucket a Navy plane spotted them, circled the berg and saw Kikortaloriak. Presently a helicopter came out and hovered like a huge bird of prey. It frightened Whitey, who hid in the last remaining cave and watched them take off Kikortaloriak to unimaginable horrors. Before she went, she argued and even struggled with the man who came down the ladder, crying, "*Nahnook! Nahnook!*" The man didn't understand Eskimo, and couldn't comprehend that she wanted to save her bear. He was anxious to be gone, so Kikortaloriak was finally bundled, weeping, up the ladder and the bird flew away.

Boredom would have descended upon Whitey again if he'd had time for it, but the berg was rapidly melting now and break-

ing up. Its center of gravity shifted several times as it melted, and occasionally it would roll over, catapulting him and his larder into the sea. When this happened, he would have to struggle desperately to save himself from a watery grave and drag what was left of his rations back onto the ice again. These affairs kept him moderately busy, and in the quiet intervals the force of habit sent him to the end of the berg, where he paddled away. Kikortaloriak would have been delighted with this tribute to the force of her personality if she had been able to see him.

Aircraft occasionally came out to report on the location and drift of Whitey's ice menace to navigation, but otherwise he was left pretty much alone; the Coast Guard had ordered all boats to stay wide of it because of its unpredictable rollings. It shrank to the size of a football field, then an auditorium, then a house, and then a split-level cottage; Whitey's efforts and the wind combined to bring the berg between the Gulf Stream and the Florida coast, until late one afternoon it stood off Miami Beach. By this time the last of the walrus was gone and the berg would just hold Whitey up.

The lights ashore began to come on; they sparkled in their myriads up and down the beach and glittered high in the air. The world was filled with lights, and the sepulchral blues and screeching reds of neon, in counterpoint, flashed off and on to remind the dwellers of the place of the delights of chewing gum, whisky and somebody's matzoth.

Whitey was enthralled; it seemed to him much more intimate, friendly and exciting than the northern lights. The ice rolled a little under his feet and he decided to go ashore. He got into the water—the deliciously warm water—and struck out. It was like being gently enwrapped in summer, without the maddening nuisance of clouds of blood-sucking mosquitoes and flies. He basked in it and paddled on, bemused, finally coming ashore in front of the Roney Plaza.

He ambled happily across the beach, and as he came, big and white and dripping, to the sidewalk, into the glitter of the lights

and crowds of people, there was a rippling gasp, a storm of yells and screams, and then a stampede. The noise died away as a passing wind dies, and in the following silence he stood confused a moment until he heard somewhere in front of him the lively and wonderful singing of an accordion. He started for it, through the Roney Beach Club. The caged monkeys and parrots screamed at him and thrashed about, but above the uproar he could still hear the accordion; he increased his pace and lumbered into the bar.

There was another stampede, the accordion stopped, and after a moment of whirling confusion, he was facing Armand across the overturned tables and chairs of the empty bar. Armand stared at him in disbelief; Armand didn't know whether to stand or flee; they stared at each other for a long minute and then Whitey, in his joy, began to wag himself furiously. Armand struck a chord tentatively, then another, then several more. Whitey stood up and began to dance.

"Whitey!" Armand shouted. "Ah, *mon vieux, mon ami!*" He dropped the accordion and ran across the room, throwing wide his arms. "Ah, *pauvre petit! A mon bras!*" They embraced, crooning, wagging, talking; stood off to admire each other, and embraced again. Armand, with his jacket and shirt in tatters, sat Whitey down and fed him with what solid refreshment he could find in the trampled place.

He was still doing it when the sirens came wailing, and a hastily gathered detail of police with riot guns moved rather gingerly in. They stood staring until one of them recalled their mission and shouted to Armand to get out of the way. Armand jumped up and stood in front of his new-found friend, spreading his arms.

"No! No!" he said. "You cannot shoot him! When I was a sailor at the North Pole I caught him! I trained him! He is fond of people! He came looking for me! He is my friend! I sue anybody that hurts him! Look! He wags himself! . . . Wag, Whitey!" Whitey wagged. "He dances!" He ran across the room,

got his accordion, and began to play. Whitey got to his feet and began his clumsy shuffle. He was the center of attention, everyone was looking at him, and he gave it all he had.

The police detail relaxed and even began to applaud. Presently the manager stuck his head fearfully around the edge of the door and saw what was going on.

"Shoot him!" he screeched. "Shoot him! I should be having one of my acts playing house with bears while the customers all run to the airport? Shoot!"

Armand ran furiously up to him. "Ah, *cochon!*" he said to the manager. "Ah, stupid pig! He is mine! He is tame! Comprehend how much money will come in if we have him in the Garden Zoo, the only bear of the arctic that comes to Miami Beach. And where does he come? To the Roney Plaza, *naturellement*. Where else?"

The manager emerged a little from behind the door and looked at Armand. "H'm," he said; and then again, "H'm. A pool we'll get for him, hah? A pool and a nice big place to have his picture taken. So. I raise your pay, and take more publicity men on the payroll. One or two maybe."

"I have the little house," Armand said. "I take him there until you have this arranged, yes?"

"H'm?" the manager said, his mind busily engaged in framing his newspaper release. "Sure. I get them started now."

He ran out, and Armand and Whitey soon followed him. Practically arm in arm they emerged into the street and set out for Armand's little house. The air was soft as cream, there was a rustle of palms on the wind; the world was full of delightful smells, and Armand began to play softly a happy tune on his accordion as they marched. Whitey ambled along beside him, touching him frequently, bemused with bliss. He had come home; it was characteristic of him that he never thought of Kikortaloriak, who had brought all this about.

THE KID IN COMMAND

By JACLAND MARMUR

ONE way or another, it has happened before. It will probably happen again. Maybe off the African coast, in Stephen Decatur's gunboat a hundred and fifty years ago, a seaman was faced with a choice like that. From Tripoli to Okinawa, one bloodstained beach is like another—they are all so far from home. So this doesn't belong to a time or a place. It belongs to the men of the fleet. To destroyer people, mostly. This kid was one of them.

They didn't know him in the USS James Blake. He didn't belong to that ship. She was lean and long, the Blake, sea-stained and battle-gray. Detached from Desron Twelve, she was steaming south and west along the rock-scarred Korean coast, coming down alone from bombardment missions in the north. Thin smoke haze trailed her funnel lips, her radar sweeping, westing sunlight washing all her starboard gun tubs. She was heeling in the ground swell, twin five-inchers midship trained, her signal yardarms bare when she stood past Yonte Cape, needing replenishment and rest. Tin cans are always overdue for replenishment and rest. This kid was too.

Russ Dobson saw him first. Dobson was on the fo'c'stle head, his chief's cap tipped far back. He was growling disapproval

about the pelican hook and the cable stopper. Somebody soon would feel his wrath. Chickman and the others up there weren't worried, though. Bosun's mates were always growling, especially twenty-year chiefs. To hear them, these days nobody did things right. Chickman grinned.

"O.K.," said Chick. "We'll watch it, chief." And then, the wisdom of half a hitch behind him, he instantly picked the breeze up where they had left it off. "All right, you tell me, Pink. Your grandpa won a war. My old man too. And here we are again. You tell me why."

"I wouldn't know," admitted Pinkerton. "Ask Dobson here. The chiefs know everything."

"It ain't my trade," growled Dobson, one thick finger thrusting down to point the anchor cable at his feet. "This is!"

The ship's head slipped against a long green swell. The chief looked up in time to see a burst of spray collapsing, loudly hissing as it fell. The westing sunfire caught his cheek, his highboned face like scarred old leather. He kept standing that way, wrinkle-eyed and peering past the ground swell toward the land. It wasn't natural. His harsh wrath should have curled around them long ago, and when it didn't Chick said quickly, "People, Pink; it's people. Saw it in a book somewhere. Ten thousand years ago, all men were hunters. Had to be. It's in the blood. It's like an instinct. Now we're so civilized ain't nothing left for men to hunt—except each other. That's why every—"

"Bridge!" The voice was Dobson's. Hoarse. Explosive. They looked up, alarmed. The chief was facing aft, big head tipped up, four five-inch rifles in the forward gunmounts snouting at him. "Bridge!" he roared. "Man in the water! Starboard bow!"

Chick spun around. His eyes were young and sharp, but he saw nothing. Blue-green water, glitter of late sunlight. Nothing more. Then Pinkerton beside him, pointing, "There! Look there!"

Chick saw it then. Dark blob in shadow, halfway to the rocky shore, thin churn of foam behind. Chick thought he saw an arm

lift, feebly waving. Man, all right. Hanging onto something, both feet thumping in the flood.

"What's wrong with all them topside lookouts? Someone ought to get chewed out!"

"Ditched pilot! Sometimes them jets go down like stone."

"In a kapok life jacket? That's no fly boy, Chick!"

It wasn't. Pinkerton was right. They could hear quick voices from the bridge. The Blake's bows tipped, knifed deeply over in the swell. Ensign Burnham was striding forward, Dobson already halfway down the weather deck to meet him.

When the chief came swaying back, his gravel voice was barking. "All right, sailors, let's get hot! They'll lay him alongside. Starboard bow. Won't use the whaler. Pink! Small line up here. Net ladder, too! He—"

"How about Wesley, chief?" Pinkerton didn't want to miss any part of a thing like this. He complained, "It ain't my watch."

"Maybe it ain't his, either, down there in the water! Move!" Dobson looked quickly out across the cold and glittering flood. What he saw made memory stab at him. His head shot back. "Corpsman up here, Chickman. On the double! Get the chief. And blankets. Move!"

They could see him clearly now. Mat of dark hair, his white face drawn, he kept dipping under, clinging to a half-washed timber with one arm. Every time his head came up, he gulped in air. He knew what he was doing, and his eyes were always open.

Dark eyes. Nothing hopeless in them. No despair. Not there. They kept glowing up at the lean tall hull, the noisy enormous bow wave bearing down upon him.

On the Blake's forecastle deck, they lined the chain rail, peering down. Dobson had the heaving line all ready in two skillful coils, his scarred brown cheek against the light, watching how the water narrowed in between. He was gauging speed, the distance, angle of approach. Only once he shot a quick glance aft. Looking upward, he could see Commander Rathbone's head

and shoulders just above the splinter shield against the bridge wing. Dobson saw the captain's head turn, saw his lips in movement to his talker.

Something flicked across the chief's gray eyes, like pride or recognition. He looked back and down at the water again. He was reassured. The skipper had the conn himself. They wouldn't overrun. When he felt the Blake's deck shudder underfoot at all astern, he snaked the line out smartly. And the kid down there caught hold.

That's how he came aboard the USS James Blake. He couldn't make the rope rungs by himself. He tried. The best he could do was hang there, eyes uplifted, blue lips mumbling something no one heard. When they hauled him inboard, he did not collapse. Water draining from his tattered dungarees, he staggered. Then he turned his head. He didn't see Mr. Burnham. He saw Dobson first. He recognized the chief's cap.

"Commanding officer!" he chattered. "Chief, I got to see—"

"Sure, kid; sure." They were pulling the kapok life jacket off him. The corpsman's kit was open, a tube of morphine in his hand. "Shock," the medic was saying. "Bound to be. The blanket, Doyle! He'll—"

"Commanding officer!" The kid still chattered. "Got to see him! I—"

"Sure, kid; sure." The medic reached out, morphine needle bare. "Must have been rough," he soothed. "Tell us about it later."

"No!" The kid pulled his arm away. He wasn't chattering any more. "Commanding officer!" he cried again, his voice a little wild. "Now!"

He thrust them all aside. He was swaying aft. He must have been a tin-can man himself. He knew exactly where the captain was. He went staggering up all the ladders, past the signal bags. Ensign Burnham was mumbling vague apology up there about a dripping enlisted man bursting to the bridge like that. The kid didn't know it. Dobson's arm was around his shoulders, as much in support as in restraint. The kid didn't know that either.

All he saw was Commander Rathbone, tall before him, binoculars against his chest. The kid shook off the chief's large arm. He came erect. He knew the captain right away.

"Hanford, sir," he said. "John Hanford, bosun's mate third. Captain, I need help."

"Well, son, you'll get it. There's no need to barge up here. The corpsmen know their trade."

"Not that, sir. I'm O.K. But I got fourteen men back on that beach, six of them wounded, two of 'em bad. I tried to signal with a mirror and some fire bursts. Couldn't reach you. They're my people. If I don't get 'em off, they'll fry! I need—"

"Do you mean to say you swam out here to intercept this ship?"

"Yes, sir. I did."

"Who is your commanding officer? Who sent you?"

"No one sent me. The way I figure, I'm in command myself."

"You!" Commander Rathbone snapped the word out and stopped short. Eyes cold and narrow, he appraised the swaying youngster for an instant while above the chatter of the signal halyards and the sobbing of the sea the murmur swept through all the people on his bridge. Battle fatigue or shock, they thought. They thought the kid hysterical. Maybe the skipper of the James Blake thought so too. "Son," he was asking sternly, "what's your ship?"

"I was in the Talbot, sir. Took sick. I got detached to hospital. Contagious ward. I—" The kid must have seen the captain's black brows lift. "Mumps!" he spat out bitterly. "I had the mumps!" Then his voice rushed on. "I was rotting in the personnel pool at Pusan waiting orders when this mission came along. I volunteered." He took a forward step, eyes burning. "Captain, there ain't much time left. I got an hour. Maybe two at most. As soon as it closes down real dark, them people are gonna get slaughtered. Maybe the Gooks are bringing mortars up right now. I got to get 'em off that beach! I need—"

The captain's hard voice broke in, "Son, you need to make more sense."

"Sense? All right, sir, sense! We put an Army demolition team ashore to blow a tunnel and a bridge. Last night. I was in the landing party. We blew it. Then we got jumped. Must have been a whole platoon. Offshore, in the LCM, I guess they saw the fire fight. I saw Lieutenant Darby start her in to get us off, both motors open wide. Then the LCM blew up. Mine, maybe. I don't—"

The captain's voice cracked out, "Supporting ship! What name?"

"Code call was Dingbat Four. I think we were supposed to rendezvous with her tonight. I don't know when or where. We never had a chance to call her. Radios all smashed. The lieutenant, Sparks, and the chief got killed. The Army captain too. We knew we couldn't hold out where we were. Not as soon as it got light. Beach too exposed. No cover. So we had to leave the dead. We took our wounded with us. They kept sniping at us, but we made it. We dug in." The kid made a wild, vague gesture toward the land. "There!" Then his voice rushed on. "It's a good position, sir. Rocky. Right back against the beach. They can't reach us except across an open pass. Corporal and a Pfc have got it covered from a forward boulder. I got three men on each flank. Good cover. We got weapons, some grenades left. They tried to overrun us twice. They won't try again till dark. After that, they're cooked. I got an hour, captain. Two at most. If I don't get 'em off in time, they'll fry."

It poured from him. It drained him nearly dry. Dobson wasn't looking at the kid. The chief was looking at the captain, saw the glitter in Commander Rathbone's eyes. He heard the skipper's hard voice saying, "This ship is under orders for squadron rendezvous. Do you really expect me to—"

"Yes, sir, I do!" The kid's eyes glowed. He was a bosun's mate third, and he cut a three-striper short. He broke into a full commander's speech! Ensign Burnham blinked. Not Dobson. Something glowed inside the chief. He still kept looking at the captain, hearing that kid rush on: "I don't mean to be disre-

spectful, sir. The Navy put them people on the beach. When I saw this tin can standing down, I told them the Navy would get them off. I'm Navy, sir. Enlisted Navy. I was the only rated man left alive. The way I learned it, I took charge. I figure I'm in technical command. Those people are mine. I got to get 'em off! That's why I swam out here. I need your help. I need—"

The glitter was growing stronger in Commander Rathbone's eyes. "For a bosun's mate third," he murmured, "you have taken a lot for granted."

The kid's whole body sagged. An instant only, though. His dark eyes shot out toward the beach. His voice came taut, its calmness terrible. "I didn't shove out here to save my own skin. Lolly will think so for sure, when he sees this can steam off. And them people will fry." He made half a turn toward the after bridge. "I'm a pretty strong swimmer, sir. I'd just as soon fry with them. I request permission to leave the ship."

He meant it! He meant to rejoin his people the same way he had come. He meant to go back where he belonged. He was halfway to the signal bag when Commander Rathbone's voice snapped at him, "Hanford!" The kid turned slowly. "You will want the motor whaler, son," the skipper said. "How many men?"

"Five, six. No more. Be in the way, sir." The kid came striding back, excitement burning in his eyes. "Ammo, sir. And a medic. We got to have covering battery fire when we start to retire. I figure—"

"Simmer down now, son. You want dry clothes. . . . Mr. Burnham, get the gunnery officer. Have the whaler called away."

"Aye, aye, sir." Ensign Burnham's voice was dry. He didn't approve. He thought the captain's treatment of enlisted personnel entirely too unorthodox. "Captain, I would like to go," he said.

"No." Commander Rathbone shook his head. An odd smile touched his lips. "This seems to be an enlisted man's operation."

He looked at Dobson sharply. The chief looked back. A flash of understanding passed between them. "Dobson," the skipper asked, "do you want to take the boat?"

"No, sir, I don't." Then Dobson grinned. "But I will."

"Good." The captain knew what Dobson meant. No one wanted to get himself killed. "You bring these people back."

That's how it was. The last cold light was draining from the water when the USS James Blake put her whaleboat smartly overside. The land looked dark, some sun fire still along its ragged peaks, white curl of surf along the rocky beach. Hanford, in the stern-sheets with the chief, looked back and up. From down here where the sea noise was, the ship looked huge, sharp-angled, bristling with her armament. For moments he could see the shapes and faces of her topside people and he thought Commander Rathbone's cold blue eyes were boring at him from above the bridge wing splinter shield.

Fear touched him. He could feel the spasm of it at his stomach's pit. He felt the boat slide down along the steep flank of the ground swell, tossing sprays before she surged. Then he could see the Blake's three gunmounts stir. They turned together toward the land. The gun snouts lifted all in unison. Six rifle barrels, long and deadly, hovered up there, hesitated, lowered, and then suddenly hung still. The ship receded with them, gently swinging. But the rifles kept on pointing where he'd told them to. Lieutenant Gridley had it all triangulated. Hanford felt the spasm in his belly twist, hurl upward in sharp pain. Fresh rated. Third class. How much did he know? Suppose he'd told it wrong! He swallowed hard. He wanted to cry out. They ought to check again. They couldn't. They were halfway to the beach already, and they didn't have much time. The kid turned forward, swallowing again.

"We get two hundred yards offshore, they'll open fire," he said. Voice sounded funny. Was it really his? He tried again. "Spaced salvos. Call fire when we need it. The Old Man said we better do it fast."

"Damn right!" The voice was Pinkerton's. "Sure wish we had

a walkie-talkie radio." Pink didn't have the watch, but he was there. "You got the right word on the signals, Flags?"

"I got 'em. You all better get 'em too." The quartermaster chuckled. "Maybe I'm just striking for a purple heart. If I make it, someone else has got to take these flags. Chick, you better say again."

"O.K., Buzz." Chickman started rattling off, "All horizontal, shoulder high and still—cease fire. Flags straight aloft and still, commence again. Aloft, both waving, raise the range. Both at the shoulder, waving downward, lower range. One flag out right and shoulder high, come right. And left the same. That right, Hanford?"

"Yeah, Chick, yeah. That's right." The kid could only hope his voice was sounding better now. He wasn't sure. "All spot calls are for fifty yards."

"Fifty? You nuts? Lieutenant Gridley can shoot, but you sure sliced it close!"

"He said he'd try."

"O.K. now. Better knock it off." The gravel voice was Dobson's. He spoke out at last. "That beach looks rocky foul. Where's your sandspit, Hanford? See it yet?"

The kid peered forward through the bow spray toward the land. It looked different from a landing boat. That tin can's cold-eyed skipper should have sent an officer. You had an officer, he told you what to do. The chief was here, though. He looked like he had his twenty in already. He looked tough. The kid was glad the chief was there.

Then suddenly his dark eyes narrowed and he flung his arm out, pointing, crying, "There! Between those offshore boulders, chief! Sandspit. Gravel bottom. We can—"

"Tell the coxs'n, son. Don't growl at me." Dobson's voice was gruff. "You got the conn."

The kid looked up. Swiftly. Dobson's big head never stirred, eyes on the beach, his cheek like saddle leather. What the devil was the matter with him! Wasn't he the chief? First twinge of anger stirred in Hanford. Then his eyes flew landward and he

cried, "Come right! You see that sandspit, coxs'n? Bring her——"

"Got it, Hanford. We're on rails now. Shoreside liberty party! Here we go."

A ragged crackling reached them from the land. They stiffened in the whaler. Small-arms fire! The beach was in clear sight now, boulder strewn, reaching inland like a funnel narrowing. Up there they saw quick-licking points of orange fire, the smoke bursts punching out. Hanford thought dark shapes were stirring there. Twenty. Thirty. Panic touched him.

"You see 'em, chief? That's where they are! They see the ship. They see us too. In a minute they'll start screaming. They'll charge out. We got to pin 'em down! Lolly and the corporal are behind that forward boulder up there by itself. They only got five, six grenades left. They'll get overrun! Why don't the ship start——"

"Simmer down. You said two hundred yards." Dobson's gravel voice was calm. "Lieutenant Gridley knows two zero zero when he——"

Explosion cut him short. It came from far astern. Enormous sounding, its blast and concussion rocked the whaler. They could feel the air compress aloft. The kid's head spun around. He was in time to see six five-inch rifle muzzles drool out smoke. First salvo from the USS James Blake! Shells on the way. First shells to help his people. Low across the wine-dark water he could see the ship's slow heel and her recovery. Gray silhouette against the sky, sea-scarred and battle-gray, white feather of a bow wave at her eyes. Tin can out there! The kid belonged in tin cans. He could see her three twin-mounted guns all stirring down, then up in perfect unison, director holding on the target, compensating her slow roll. Then shell bursts crashed against the land. Fear welled up in him. If they'd struck too close! If he had told it wrong! His eyes flew shoreward just in time to see erupting dust and rubble.

"On!" he screamed. "Right on!"

"Then leave her be," growled Dobson. "Don't look back. She'll do what she's supposed to. Don't look back!"

"Sure, chief. O.K." The beach was rushing toward him now, black tide-washed boulders on each side. Astern he heard the second salvo crash out from the Blake's main battery. Clean-spaced shooting. Fire cover for the landing. Fire cover for the men. And Hanford told the chief, "I think we better get the wounded first. We better bring the medic, chief. I'll show you where—"

"Don't show me!" Dobson spat it out. "You told the Old Man you took technical command. That's fine!" Then all at once the chief's voice lost its harshness. When the kid looked at him, half a grin twitched past the muscles of that big, scarred face. "It's your show. Son, you name it and we'll do it. You're in charge."

He meant it. He was asking for his orders from a frightened bosun's mate third class. It wasn't fair! The kid had asked for help to help his people. He had never asked to carry the whole load. Resentment stirred in him. The big man kept on looking at him, eyes like steel. Then anger flamed in Hanford, anger drowning out the fear.

"O.K.!" the kid cried. "Cut the engine. Beach her, coxs'n!" Voice wasn't sounding funny to him any more. It was his own. It sounded savage, full of wrath. The chief's grin broke, but Hanford didn't see it. "Two of you stand by the whaleboat. Hit for cover, all the rest. Keep that ammo dry. You watch me, Flags. All ready? Jump then! Here we go."

That's how it was. The kid took charge. He had to. And he knew he had to do it fast. They brought the wounded to the whaleboat first. The kid remembered that. How could a man forget how wounded look along the shell-pocked beaches far from home? The rest was not so clear. It got mixed up in gunfire, in erupting shell bursts, in the nearer, deadly chatter of small arms and automatic fire. He knew the Blake was out there. Offshore, hovering in smoky sea haze, she looked gray and narrow, flame tongues spearing from her in slow rhythm.

Hanford heard the five-inch common whining overhead before each salvo slammed against the land in deafening explosions. They crashed where he'd told them to. Up past the nar-

row tip of this funnel-shaped and rock-strewn beach. Up past the boulders there where Lolly and the corporal were. Time they retired. What were they doing up there? Suddenly he knew. He saw the two shapes, dark against the land. They darted out from cover, two arms swinging back to hurl grenades, then instantly dived for the ground again. Salvo from the Blake slammed far beyond them. Flame bursts and erupting debris. Far. Too far! Before the hurled earth settled, dark specks leaped from cover, burp guns spouting. Lolly and the corporal were pinned down.

“Flags!” the kid cried. “Signal! Lower the range! Quick!”

The quartermaster leaped erect, flags at his shoulders, both out horizontal, waving downward rapidly. Next salvo from the Blake—where would it burst? Could the lieutenant, back there far away in the director, spot two flimsy buntings on a distant beach? Could he bring that deadly gunfire lower? Only fifty yards? Maybe Hanford wondered. Maybe not. He sprang up. He was crying, “When I get there, Flags, you watch me! We’ll start back. You see us running, wave again. Down fifty more! I’ll—”

“You nuts? You know what splinter bursts of five-inch shell can do?”

Maybe that was Dobson. Hanford didn’t know. He didn’t care. The anger swirled in him. Chief handed him the load. Too late to take it back. He had to pin those devils with the burp guns down for long enough to get the corporal out. And Lolly. Lolly, grinning slyly when he’d said he’d swim out to the ship for help. Lolly thought he’d save his own skin if he made it. Didn’t like the Navy. Lolly never thought he would come back. Well, here he was.

“You heard me, Flags! You do it like I said!”

The kid’s voice curled. Then he was racing over broken ground. He thought some others ran beside him. Pink and Chickman? Never asked them. What would they be doing here? And Dobson. Was that him, that big hulk, lumbering along and grinning with a carbine at ready? Hanford didn’t know. He saw

young Lolly on the ground behind a boulder, and the corporal kneeling. He dived in beside them.

"Well," said Lolly, looking upward, face all twisted. "Damn if it ain't Navy!" Lolly tried to grin. "You did come back. Navy, I never thought—"

"Sure, Lolly; sure. You're hurt. We're shoving off. I'll carry you."

"Keep down! Blake salvo on the way!" The voice was harsh. The gravel voice was Dobson's, after all. Then shell bursts and eruption, deafening and close. That tin can out there gave you what you asked for! Maybe it would keep those devils quiet for a while. How long? Before the rain of debris ended, the harsh voice again. "Now! On your way!"

That's what the kid remembered best. Big, hulking man with gravel in his throat, half-crouching, Pink and Chickman on each side, all spraying bursts of automatic fire. Covering him. Moving backward with him while he staggered down a beach to where the whaleboat was. Lolly draped across his shoulder. Corporal limping. Salvo from the Blake again. Must have come down fifty more. Shellfire walking closer to the water's edge. Then stillness. Startling and abrupt. Who could believe such stillness? Voices murmured in it. Slap of water and an engine's drone.

Then suddenly he knew. The beach was fading into the distance. He could not remember clearly when they launched. He knew they must have, though. Gray shape ahead. Sharp-angled, full of gun tubs. Rocking on the ocean. Looming in the sea haze. Blotting out the dusky sky. Destroyer USS James Blake.

"Did we get 'em all, chief?"

"Yeah, son, all. Except Lolly. The Pfc is dead."

The kid said nothing. He just blinked his eyes. Someone has to pick the chit up. This time it was Lolly. Lolly didn't think the kid would ever make it. Lolly never thought he would come back. Hanford blinked again. Then at last he murmured, "Anyhow, he knew."

No one heard him. They were rounding to. Looming wall of

gray steel towering above the whaleboat, faces peering down, the noisy slap and sob of water in between. Then they hooked on. Hanford staggered when he reached the deck. It was too solid underfoot. He kept babbling profound worry for his wounded. Man who took charge had to worry. If he didn't, who else would?

"Sir, we brought them all," the kid was saying. He was talking to a man with cold and Spartan eyes who had binoculars against his chest. He was giving his report to the commanding officer. It was correct and proper that he should. "All except the Pfc," he blurted. "Lolly got hurt bad. I carried him myself. I wanted him back most of all. I'm sorry, sir. He died. Beefy's hurt bad too. I wouldn't want to lose——"

"They are being cared for, son. They'll be all right."

"Thank you, sir."

"I am sending a signal to Dingbat Four. I thought you would like to know." The glitter showed again in the commander's eyes. He still remembered how a bosun's mate, third class, fished dripping from the water, fiercely asked his help for people pinned down on a hostile beach, demanding it because he was the man in charge. A slow smile touched the captain's lips. He spoke with clarity. "As one commander to another, son—you did all right." The kid just blinked his eyes. Commander Rathbone seemed to understand why he still stood there, swaying. "Son," he said with gravity, "you are relieved."

"Thank you, sir."

The kid's voice trailed off thinly. When he heard those last words, suddenly the load fell from him. When the burden dropped, he sagged. He thought someone supported him. It looked like Dobson, but he wasn't sure. It seemed to him the voices kept on murmuring, and he was sure he saw young Ensign Burnham frown. Couldn't help it. All the ladderways on this tin can were too unsteady. They kept rocking and he had to watch them with great care. Something told him he was in the wrong place. Chiefs' compartment? He didn't belong there. And the voices were still murmuring.

"Pretty crowded for'ard, sir. I put him in my bunk." Hanford recognized the gravel voice. Dobson didn't sound tough, after all. "Shut-eye's all he needs. He'll do."

Hanford thought he grinned. He'd keep awake. That's what he'd do. He knew the skipper was down there too. He'd lie there, listening. He'd play it cute. There was something funny between that tall three-striper and the big-faced chief. Now and then you saw it. Not too often. Mostly between old Navy CPO's and some scramble-egg-capped officer. Like Dobson here and this commander. When they looked hard at each other, something flashed between. Quick as lightning, cold as steel. Something they both recognized.

"Mr. Burnham seems browned off," the skipper said in a voice too still and quiet for a tin can's bridge. "The ensign is fresh from the academy, chief. He doesn't approve at all. He doesn't approve of you either, Dobson, letting that kid take charge." Commander Rathbone chuckled. It was a most astonishing thing to hear from that cold-eyed man. "Did you ever hear about the destroyer Perry, chief? The Perry was tied up at Mare Island Navy Yard in 1906. My father was an ensign then. After the earthquake, the whole Frisco water front was burning. My father says the commandant sent every man he could down bay to help. For several hours, on one of those days, there wasn't a soul on board the Perry except a Chinese wardroom steward. The mooring lines were in need of quick attention on the tide, and he took charge. Good job he did. The point is, chief, that for those hours a Chinese by the name of Sing Hoy had the honor of being in technical command of a fully commissioned ship of war of the United States Navy. I must tell Mr. Burnham about it." Commander Rathbone chuckled again. "If a Chinese steward's mate can pick up the chain of command—so can a bosun's mate third."

"Seems like when it's needful, sir, somebody always does."

"Yes. Let's hope somebody always will. Do you think I ought to fly Tare Victor George at the yardarm for him, chief?"

"Operation completed? No, sir, I don't." Dobson's voice was

quick and flat. "Not on this lousy coast. They ain't gonna finish it here. They ought to, but they won't. It ain't completed at all. We're gonna have to do it someplace else. Someplace soon. We're gonna have to do it all over again."

"Maybe, Dobson, maybe." The skipper was looking down at the kid. "Name's Hanford," he was saying. "John Hanford, isn't it? Said he was waiting orders. I intend to ask for him. Make a good man for your division, chief. Be a good man for the ship."

"Yes, sir. He would."

"I wonder how old he is."

"Looks like maybe—" Dobson's voice cut short. When it spoke again, it sounded almost harsh. "Sir," it said, "I hope he's way past twenty-one!"

"Why?"

They were looking at each other now. Hanford should have seen it. Tall three-striper, tin-can skipper in fresh khakis, scrambled eggs along his cap peak. And the chief in dungarees, named Dobson, big man with the face like leather, scarred by conflict. They were staring at each other, blowers humming in the chiefs' compartment, sea noise sounding faint and muffled. They were silent for an instant. In that instant the quick lightning flashed between them. Hanford should have seen it. Tarawa and the 'Canal were in it. Saipan and the Okinawa picket line. Things half forgotten leaped up; all the perished comrades who were deathless rose, all crying glory and enormous tragedy. Respect was in it too. Respect for dignity and competence.

Then suddenly it passed. The lightning flickered out. And Dobson grinned. Dobson had three daughters, and no sons. Just like Commander Rathbone. Dobson didn't mind. The captain did. It was the first time in a hundred years no Rathbone son was at Annapolis or in the Line. The skipper was always prowling for some likely youngster he could sponsor. Dobson grinned again.

"I hope," he was repeating, "I hope he's way past twenty-one."

Kid like that, sir, wouldn't feel right in a wardroom. Just like me. He'll ship over. Bound to. He's enlisted Navy. He'll——"

"And the first thing Stateside, Dobson," snapped Commander Rathbone, "you intend to introduce him to your youngest girl!"

"Yes, sir, I do. I sure do." Then Dobson's broad grin faded. "He will make a darn good chief, sir," Dobson's gravel voice said firmly. "Good chiefs ain't too easy nowadays to find."

The kid had never heard a word of it. The kid was fast asleep.

TERROR BENEATH THE SEA

By ARTHUR GORDON

We shall win the next war, not on land or even in the air, but under the surface of the sea.—Pravda.

THE Russian admiral said in his soft, menacing voice, "You are supposed to be the experts, gentlemen. I am only a sailor. You were brought to this island to give me explanations, not theories. Facts, not fantasies." His cold eyes probed the faces of the three men in front of his desk. "Do I make myself clear?"

Outside, the pale sunlight glinted impartially on the camouflaged buildings, the fixed bayonets of the sentries, the sluggish steel-colored sea. Here discipline was ironclad, security was complete. This was Arctic Experimental Station B, Vice Admiral Kutsov commanding. The experiments had only one purpose: to make sure that Russia possessed the strongest, deadliest submarine fleet in the world.

It was a nightmare place, but well chosen—and for a single reason. At three points only the cone of the submerged volcano broke the surface. This tiny islet and two jagged splinters of rock—lost, forgotten, until the Soviets had discovered the drowned giant, had found a use for the awful pit descending into the unimaginable depths of the sea.

The admiral pushed back his chair and stood up, a compact,

powerful figure. He had been speaking in English for the benefit of Snyder, the renegade British scientist.

Now he continued, his voice suddenly shrill and angry, "You have already had a week! You have had the privilege of witnessing a duplication of our first experiment. And what are the results? We lose another of our T-class submarines—our newest and best. How? Why? That is what you three experts are supposed to tell me. And you tell me nothing!"

"You are going too deep!" Snyder's thin, embittered face was flushed. "Thirty-five hundred meters—that's over two miles! No submersible can withstand such pressures!"

"That is not true!" Brodsky, the Russian designer, turned on him, clenching his huge fists. "My submarines can go even deeper! They are designed to withstand a pressure of four hundred atmospheres—or more. The pressure did not destroy them! Something else did!"

The admiral was watching the third man, who stood silent, arms folded. "And you, my dear von Dehn! My superiors assure me that you are, without question, the world's greatest authority on submarine-detection devices. They say that we were most fortunate to be able to—ah—borrow you at the end of the last war; that you have worked for us faithfully and well. What is your explanation?"

The tall, gray-haired German nodded coldly toward the desk. "You have my report."

"Report?" Kutsov slammed his hand down on the back of the chair. "Of course I have your report! It says you tracked the T-Two with your latest devices down to thirty-five hundred meters. That there you got a brief double echo, and then, nothing. Nothing! But that's impossible! Even if the hull of the T-Two had collapsed, even if she had been crushed like an egg shell, still you should have been able to get an echo. From the wreckage. All the way down to the bottom. Down, down, down! Isn't that so?"

"Theoretically." The German's voice was edged with contempt.

Kutsov's face crimsoned. "Then why didn't you?"

"Because," Brodsky said excitedly—"because she was caught in some strong crosscurrent, was swept under a ledge, was pinned there—"

Snyder gave a snort of disgust. "I can tell you flatly that there are no such currents at that depth. Certainly not in the crater of an extinct volcano that descends far below the level of the surrounding ocean floor. It was the pressure, I tell you. Three hundred and fifty atmospheres! Insanity!" He gestured wildly, the jerky, un-co-ordinated movement of a badly frightened man. "You had never tried to go below a thousand meters before. Then suddenly you descend to more than three times that depth. Madness!"

Brodsky turned on him furiously. "And I tell you—"

"Silence!" Kutsov cut him off. He pointed one stubby finger accusingly. "Von Dehn, you have been given every consideration. You were allowed to bring your own equipment, even your own assistant. The barge was placed exactly as you directed. I will give you twenty-four hours; no more! After that, failure to produce an explanation will be treated as sabotage—sabotage by all of you! The loss of one or two submarines and their crews—that is nothing. But the failure to produce an explanation of their loss—that is a crime against the state!"

The German clicked his heels and made a little ironic bow. "I understand your position, admiral. In less than twenty-four hours, I trust, you will have your answer."

Outside, the pale sun had plunged into the sea; the air was gray and chill. The helmeted guard swung into position behind von Dehn, but the German ignored him. From where he stood he could see clearly the pontoon bridge that he had caused to be built, one end anchored to the volcanic rock, the other attached to the barge that held his equipment. Only thus could the barge be kept in place, centered exactly over the stupendous column of water. There he had sat, supersensitive earphones clamped to his head, following the T-2 as she settled into the

abyss. There he had been sitting when the strong, clear echo—and the submarine itself—vanished, two miles down in the icy dark. Two miles down—

And then—— He clenched his fists suddenly. He had decided not to think any more about it. The time for thinking was past. The time for everything was past. Except for the last few hours of waiting. Except for——

A hand plucked urgently at his sleeve. He turned. It was Snyder, his rodent face pinched with fright, the long flannel scarf around his neck wildly incongruous, it was so untidy, so completely civilian.

“Von Dehn, you told Kutsov that he’d get an explanation! Did you mean that? Or were you just bluffing? You heard what he said! They’ll charge us with sabotage! There won’t even be a trial!”

The German gave him a thin-lipped smile. “You should have given some thought to such a possibility before you fled from London, before you changed sides.”

“You also changed sides!”

“Only,” said von Dehn, “because, when they captured me, they captured my wife and child as well.” He pulled his great coat tighter around him. “And now, if you’ll excuse me——”

“I don’t want to die!” Snyder fairly shrieked the words. “If you can just find the explanation, if you can just give Kutsov the right answer——”

“It would make no difference,” the German said. “We have seen this place. We have even been aboard a T-class submarine. Do you think they would let a foreigner live, knowing what we know now? Don’t be naïve, my friend!”

He shook off the imploring hand, went swiftly down the steep ramp that led to the water. The guard followed him stolidly; their footsteps rang on the stout planking of the pontoon bridge. Beneath them the ocean lay black, silent, unbelievably deep. Here, eons ago, water had conquered fire in an explosion that made man’s latest efforts seem puny by comparison.

Unbidden, a phrase from Genesis leaped into the German’s

mind: *And the earth was without form, and void; and darkness was upon the face of the deep.* Unconsciously he quickened his stride. There was not much more time.

Where the bridge met the barge, the guard halted. This concession, at least, von Dehn had been able to wring from his captors: no surveillance while he was actually at work. There were hidden microphones, of course, designed to record the words that passed between him and his assistant. But he knew how to deal with those. The mastery of sound in all its phases—this was the ruling passion of his life.

He went straight to the control room. Bohrmann, his assistant, sprang to attention, slipping the earphones from his head. Bohrmann with his high pale forehead and nervous fingers, one of East Germany's most brilliant young scientists, assigned to von Dehn by special order of the Kremlin. Bohrmann who, having no fatherland, gave all his loyalty, all his allegiance to the older man.

"Any change?" Von Dehn's voice sounded harsh, strained.

"The rate of ascent is accelerating, sir!"

"How much?"

"It's rising now at almost three meters per minute."

"And its depth?"

Bohrmann's eyes flicked to the desk pad with its jumble of calculations and symbols. "Just under eight hundred meters!"

Von Dehn's mouth tightened. "That gives us until—just about dawn. Did you try again to calculate the size?"

Bohrmann nodded. He ran his tongue once over his lips. "It's even larger than we thought it was."

Von Dehn picked up the headphones, adjusted them, and sat down at the control panel. Here he had been sitting five days ago when the T-2 vanished, when the strange double echo had come ringing back, and then—silence. Here he and Bohrmann had sat all through that day, all through the next night, probing, probing with their invisible fingers of sound, employing other devices, too—devices designed to cut through the vary-

ing temperature layers, devices more sensitive and accurate than any others in existence, devices that were the product of naked genius—von Dehn's and to some extent Bohrmann's. And near dawn, almost eighteen hours after the submarine had vanished, they made their first contact with—it.

They had thought, at first, that it was the submarine. Bohrmann had sprung to his feet with a hoarse cry of triumph. But von Dehn had sat quite still, finger tips frozen on the control dials. Because, although the contact was faint and elusive, something was wrong. He knew it instinctively, instantly. And as he listened, the conviction grew that it was not the submarine. The quality of the contact was different. It was not a contact with honest man-made metal. It was a contact with something else.

Something huge, something formless, something malignant, menacing. Far down in the icy blackness, sightless, soundless, something stirred. Despite the frightful pressure—almost four hundred tons to the square foot—something moved. And then they lost the contact.

Two hours later they picked it up again, held it long enough to try another method of submarine detection, based on another principle entirely. And Bohrmann said, gray-faced, "The way it moves, it's almost as if it were reacting to our signals. It's almost as if it were—" He did not finish the sentence.

Von Dehn nodded slowly. His face looked drawn and old. "That's right," he said. "It's almost as if it were—alive."

In the nightmare hours that followed they established contact and lost it three times. The thing kept disappearing, kept moving out of range into some vast cavern or gallery where they could not track it. And it was angry. There was purpose in the way it came forth, hurling its great bulk into the tremendous funnel of rock, then withdrawing slowly, sullenly. They plotted its size as best they could, then looked at each other, silent, unbelieving. Beside it, a submarine, even a T-class submarine, would have been a toy, a matchstick.

And Bohrmann said, in a whisper, "They won't believe us when we report it. Kutsov won't believe us. No one will believe us."

And von Dehn said, "There will be no report, understand? No report whatever."

When they lost contact for the third time, the older man flung himself on a couch, exhausted. He would not sleep, he told himself—only rest for five minutes, ten. But he did sleep, he must have slept, because he woke with a start to find Bohrmann shaking him. It was cold in the control room, but Bohrmann's pale forehead was glistening with sweat.

"It's moving again," he said. "This time it's moving up!"

Gradually, inexorably it came, the thing that was impossible, the thing that could not be. One meter per minute at first. Slowly, slowly, adjusting to the change in pressure, while on the island the Russian radar scanned the skies for possible enemies from without and the guards maintained their iron vigilance against any betrayal, any sabotage from within. Up, up, pausing now and then, but never for long. Nearer, always nearer.

And once Bohrmann said wildly, "Maybe we're goading it with our signals! Maybe if we stop, it'll go back down, back where it belongs, back where it came from!"

And von Dehn said, his face set like stone, "Keep tracking!"

And Bohrmann said, "But what will it do—what will it do when it reaches the surface?"

And von Dehn said, "Ask the crew of the T-Two! Don't ask me!"

And they tracked it, they kept on tracking it, one of them always at the control panel, careful to make out the daily report for Kutsov, careful to make sure that it said nothing.

Von Dehn slept little, Bohrmann not at all. On the third morning, Bohrmann cried out suddenly, "I'm not afraid to die! I'll die gladly if I can take three thousand Russians with me! But I can't stand this waiting! I can't stand this not knowing!"

Looking at him with red-rimmed eyes, von Dehn felt a surge of anger. "No one is forcing you to wait! You have a razor, do

you not? Or if you dislike the touch of steel, the water outside is cold—and deep!"

Bohrmann passed a shaking hand across his face. "I'm sorry," he said at length. "I'm all right now. It won't happen again."

"It's no disgrace to fear death," von Dehn said more gently. "And the unknown is harder to face. But you must recognize the importance of controlling fear. If we give way to panic, the Russians may discover what we know. They might be able to evacuate the island—submarines, technicians, everything. They might even seal off the crater with a fission bomb. That must not be allowed to happen. We owe it to ourselves, to Germany, to the whole Western world. We must sit here and listen. We must wait."

"Yes," said Bohrmann woodenly, "you are right. We must wait."

So they waited, through the fourth day and into this, the fifth. Looking now at his assistant's haggard face, von Dehn felt a sudden twinge of pity. "Lie down," he said. "Get some rest. I'll take over here."

But Bohrmann shook his head. "I might fall asleep. I'm afraid to sleep. I don't want to be asleep when—"

"I'll wake you," said von Dehn. "If we begin to get an instantaneous echo, I'll wake you. I promise."

He took the younger man by the arm, led him over to the couch. "Lie down. Lie down." He stood over Bohrmann, waiting until fatigue conquered fear, until the pale eyelids closed. He said softly, "It's a pity you are so young." He turned and went back to the control panel.

He checked once more the rate of ascent. Almost four meters per minute. He checked the depth. Seven hundred meters. Soon, now. Very soon.

He woke Bohrmann as he had promised. He saw fear fill the wide eyes, saw in them, too, the unspoken question. He nodded, saw Bohrmann leap to his feet, hurl himself through the control-room door. Well, let him go; it made no difference now.

Under his feet, for the first time, von Dehn felt a faint tremor. It came again, not sudden or abrupt, but slow, inexorable, as if the world were tilting slightly, as if the sea itself were being displaced, were being shouldered aside. Outside, he knew, dawn was graying the sky. There was no wind, no sound.

The barge lurched, staggered, rose. A strange and horrible odor filled the air, a coldness like a breath from the tomb. Still there was no sound, but suddenly Bohrmann came floundering back, mouth twisted, eyes wild. Von Dehn had seen many men die, but he had never seen such fear, such naked terror, on any human countenance.

“Run!” shrieked Bohrmann. “For God’s sake, run!” And he fled.

But Eric von Dehn, who feared death as much as any man, was still too proud to run from it. He sat there, a thin set smile on his face, waiting for death to come to him. And it came.

From the shore came a vast rending sound, and then a hideous jumble of noises: the brazen clangor of alarm gongs, and the crack of rifles, and a high-pitched, inhuman screaming.

But these did not last long. . . .

Out from Murmansk, out from Archangel roared the avenging planes in response to the wild, incoherent call, the radio distress call that ended in mid-sentence. Out they came, the red stars on their wings gleaming in the pearly light. They were fast, they were deadly, but they were too late.

Gone were the camouflaged buildings, the docks, the installations. Gone were the submarines, the crews that manned them, the men who serviced them. Gone were the concrete submarine pens—not just destroyed, but gone completely, utterly vanished.

Only the naked rock remained, barren as it had been in the beginning. And a fetid odor that defied the cold north wind. And a trace of grayish slime that rose and fell, sullenly, upon the brooding surface of the deep.

OLD ENOUGH TO DRIVE

By STEVE McNEIL

MR. DAVID HARKNESS was a tall, bony man who wore his forty-two years more or less lightly, depending on who was doing the appraising. His children thought he was creaking in the joints and not far removed from senility. His wife, Susan, though mindful of small matters such as a slightly receding hairline and a disinclination to engage in touch football with the neighborhood teenagers, treated him much the same as when they were courting. And his boss, Mr. George Garber, often called him "a young squirt."

Feeling somewhere among these three categories, Mr. Harkness came home on a soft fall evening, ran his car into the garage and turned off the ignition. Somewhat to his surprise, the engine stopped. Mr. Harkness was a capable business executive, he had more than a vague idea of molecular structure, and could give a balance sheet a casual glance and tell you whether to buy stock in the company or sell it short. But he had all the mechanical know-how of a Chinese farmer.

He knew that if he turned on the switch and pressed the starter, his automobile engine would start; he knew that the engine must have oil, for some obscure reason, and he knew that if you stepped on the brake pedal the car would stop. Beyond

that, the whole thing remained a mystery, and was a source of some irritation to his boss, who seemed to feel that there was a misplaced cog in David's brain because David could never understand the workings of a camshaft and, if asked, would say that a universal joint was a bar which was not particular about its clientele.

David was well aware that this blank spot was the reason he had not been made second vice-president. Mr. Garber believed in what he called "the well-rounded man," which meant that you should know something of football, automobiles, golf, foreign policy, fishing, the price of liver and anything else that came to Mr. Garber's mind during luncheon.

David had even bought several books on internal-combustion engines, read them through, became more confused than before and abandoned all thoughts of a vice-presidency. Telling himself that Mr. Garber was unfair, that engines, automobiles, and related items had nothing to do with the job at hand—the job dealing in the sale of lumber on a wholesale basis—was small comfort, and at times he himself had qualms about the mental block which reared its head whenever something with wheels was discussed.

David went into the house through the back door and entered the kitchen. Susan was mixing some concoction in an electric mixer. "Hi," David said.

Susan turned off the mixer. She kissed David thoroughly. Susan was a black Irish creature with bright eyes and an ageless complexion. She patted his cheek. "How's everything?"

"O.K. What did you do today?"

She made a face. "Ironed, and you know how I hate ironing. Good thing you weren't here. I was real witchy. Talked back to television and everything."

"Stir you up a Martini," he said. "That'll help."

"O.K. Something went wrong with the washer. Jimmy's fixing it. That's if you hear any strange noises in the basement."

Jimmy came upstairs, carrying a toolbox. He was a lanky sixteen. "All fixed, mom. . . . Hi, dad."

"All fixed, huh?" David said. "What was wrong?"

Jimmy answered his father in some sort of mechanical gibberish which sounded as if he said, "The forticiple and the disconnect were cletis with the frammis, so the rammich couldn't partis."

"Oh," David said vaguely. He peered at his only son. Sometimes he thought that Jimmy was some sort of monster. When the boy was five he had started investigating old alarm clocks, had built a radio when he was eight, and at twelve had plans for constructing an airplane engine out of an outboard motor which he was planning on installing in a glider. David squelched that project. But when Jimmy was fourteen, he and another boy rebuilt a motorcycle which they had salvaged from the city dump, and on its maiden voyage promptly ran it into a tree. The only damage, other than a wrecked motorcycle, was a skinned shoulder.

After that, David put his Size 11 shoe down on any activity involving vehicles which went fast, bringing up such dull matters as liability insurance, licenses and related and lawful items. "When you're sixteen and can be licensed," he had said, "then we'll talk about getting you a car with which you can tinker." David had in mind something like the one he rode in as a boy. A Model T which strained itself to get to forty miles an hour. Then he promptly forgot the whole matter.

Jimmy took his tool kit out to the garage. David stirred the Martinis. Molly, his first born, eighteen, another black Irish whose loveliness David often viewed with alarm, came into the kitchen attired in a sweat shirt which had not seen the laundry for some time, and a pair of pedal pushers likewise soiled.

"Did you tell him, mother?" she said. "I think it's just the most ghastly thing ever."

David poured two Martinis, not unduly agitated. "The most ghastly thing ever" could be anything from the widow down the block running off with the plumber, to a run in her last good pair of nylons.

"No, Molly," Susan said. "I haven't had time."

"Well, after all, I'm eighteen and Jimmy's only sixteen, and it seems to me that I have some rights. I took driver's training and I have a license, too, so I should have some say about what we get."

Jimmy came back into the kitchen. "Did you say anything, mother?"

"I was going to tell your father," Susan said, "later." Meaning that she would wait until he was sated with dinner and in a mellow mood.

"Well, I don't see why he can just go and get that silly Ferritalia that won't even run just so—"

"Silly!" Jimmy yelped. "Look, lamebrain, that Ferritalia just happens to be—"

"Lamebrain!" Molly shouted. "Just because your brains are in a toolbox, you needn't think that I—"

"Stop this!" David shouted. He took a large gulp of his Martini, strictly for his nerves. "Now what's this Ferritalia and we'll discuss it calmly?" For all David knew, a Ferritalia was a new-type begonia.

"Gee, dad, don't you know what a Ferritalia is?" Not stated, but implied, was the fact that anyone who didn't know that might just as well get himself measured for a new set of brains.

"No," David said; "but then, I have other sterling virtues."

"Cripes, dad, they stopped manufacturing them in 1937, and four years ago started up again, but you can't get anything but a competition model with a twenty-five-grand price tag, and here's this '37 model been sitting in this old lady's barn, and she wants to get it out of the way so her son-in-law can remodel the barn and live there. And she only wants four hundred for it. I gave her all I had to hold it. Six dollars and forty-five cents."

"It hasn't even any tires," Molly said.

"Tires, shmires," Jimmy said. "It has a six-cylinder overhead cam mill and you should see the sweet suspension system. Boy, it—"

"The top is rotted out," Molly said.

"And brakes!" Jimmy said. "The biggest finned drums you ever saw. Why—"

"Wait a minute—wait a minute," David said. "This—this Ferritalia is an automobile?"

"He calls it an automobile," Molly said. "I call it a wreck. As long as we're going to have a second car, then I don't see why we don't get something that runs."

"A second car?" David said. "Who said we're going to get a second car?"

"You did," Susan said.

"I did?" David screamed. "And just when did I say this?"

"Two years ago, dad," Jimmy said. "When I wrecked the motorcycle—remember? You said that when I was sixteen I could get a car to tinker with. Didn't you, dad?"

David knew when he was whipped.

He nodded. "Yes, Jimmy, I did."

"Yippeel" Jimmy said. "Can I go up and get it now, dad? Can I? Freddy said he'd help me tow it home."

"Now, wait a minute," David said. "Just slow down. I said you could get a car. This—this—"

"Ferritalia," Jimmy said.

"Yes, whatever it is seems a little complicated for a first effort. Couldn't you find a good Model T or something?"

"A Model T!" Molly said. "What's a Model T?"

"It's a perfectly good car," David said. "I remember when I was a boy, we—"

"Holy smokes, dad," Jimmy said. "It has a planetary transmission."

"It has?" David said.

"And even if you could find one in fair condition, which I doubt, you just can't wind them up. They have a splash oiling system."

"Is that so?" David said. He was beginning to be sorry he had mentioned the Model T.

"And this Ferritalia even has a body by Giani."

"I still don't see why we can't have a car that I can use too," Molly said. "I'm two years older and there's a '48 model over at Cosart's that only costs three hundred and seventy-five dollars. And it runs!"

"So it runs," Jimmy scoffed.

"That's more than your precious Ferritalia does," Molly said.

"You just wait," Jimmy said. "It'll run the wheels off anything around here."

"All right," David said. "You two go upstairs and clean up for dinner. Your mother and I will make a decision about the car."

The children went upstairs, mumbling to each other.

"It's just what you've been preaching to him ever since he was able to understand what you said," Susan said.

"I've been preaching?"

"Buy good things, you always said. Don't throw your money away on junk. Once you've determined what you absolutely need, save your money until you can buy the best in its class. In the long run, the best things you buy are the cheapest."

"I was talking about shoes, about typewriters, about socks and sporting goods, not about automobiles."

"It's the same thing. Jimmy knows more about cars than you'll ever know, David. If he wants this Ferritalia, let him have it. At least it'll keep him busy."

"All right," David said. "Provided you don't say anything to Judith Garber about it. George would laugh his head off if he knew that I let Jimmy buy some old wreck that doesn't even run for four hundred dollars. He'd say that it was typical and he takes a dim view of my lack of mechanical acumen."

The next evening, David Harkness swung into his driveway, started to pull into his garage, and then hit the brake. He turned off his switch and stared out through the windshield, then got out of his car and walked into the garage. Jimmy was supervising three other youngsters, who were wearing coveralls with "Cam Twisters" emblazoned on the back. A chain block had been rigged from a cross beam and a black hunk of metal, which

David reasoned was an automobile engine, hung from the block. David looked at his four-hundred-dollar purchase and winced. The tires—rotted pieces of rubber—stood in a corner. The car sat on wire wheels red with rust. The top of the car had been removed and it sat in another corner, looking much like a tired tent. The leather upholstery was cracked, and pieces of wire and padding poked out through the cracks.

"Hi, dad," Jimmy said. "Here she is. Isn't she a beaut?"

It was not precisely the word that David would have used to describe the car. Several more pungent adjectives came to mind.

The young fellows in coveralls, all of whom David had seen around the house, worked away, speaking a strange language which David could not begin to translate. Their hands were blackened with grease and they had the air of concentration given only to scientists.

David saw that he wouldn't be able to get his car into the garage for some time, said, "Well, good luck with it," and went into the house.

Susan was making a salad. "Hi," she said.

"Four hundred dollars!" David moaned. He waved his hand toward the garage. "Why, that thing will never run again, if it ever did."

"I must admit that I expected a bit more," Susan said, "but then, you know Jimmy. I haven't a doubt that it will, as he said, run the pants off anything in town."

Molly came into the kitchen. "Well!" she said. "Did you see it?"

"Uh-huh," David said.

"Honestly!" Molly said. "You'd think it was something precious or something. And they're so smug about it. That Harold White!"

"Who's Harold White?" David said.

"The greasiest of those greasy goons out there," Molly said. "Just because they're all covered with grease, they think nobody has a brain. . . . Mother, what is it about a man that makes

him some sort of superior being just as soon as he gets greasy?"

"Men," Susan said, "are just little boys at heart. They love to play in dirt."

Molly went into the dining room. They could hear her mumbling to herself about men, and about how she was going to have a career, and that Harold White could just jolly well drown himself in grease, for all she cared.

"What gets me," David said, "is how they're going to get that thing put back together. The thing is spread all over the garage. Four hundred bucks!"

He shook his head, went into the front room and picked up the evening paper.

When Susan called them for dinner, Jimmy came to the table, his hands miraculously flesh-colored, his eyes gleaming. "Boy!" he said. "That thing is built like a watch!" He launched into an involved explanation of timing chains, camshafts, counterbalanced crankshafts and torsion-bar suspension. "And those wheels! Beautiful!"

"Beautiful and rusty," Molly said.

"They're Boroni wheels, lamebrain," Jimmy said. "Knock off that surface rust and rechrome 'em, and you really got something."

"Oh?" Molly said. "And what have you got? It still doesn't run."

"Doesn't run—doesn't run," Jimmy said. "A lot you know."

"Well, does it?"

"You wait," Jimmy said. "You'll be begging for a ride."

"That'll be the day!" Molly said.

"That's enough," David said. "Eat your dinner. We'll reserve judgment for the time being."

After dinner Jimmy went out to the garage, came in an hour and a half later. Susan and David were playing gin rummy. "Mother, where's your big roasting pan?"

"In the cupboard to the right of the stove," Susan said, her mind intent on the game.

Some time later they went out to the kitchen to make coffee. The large roasting pan was on the breakfast-nook table, filled with some sort of fluid in which weird-looking parts were soaking.

David went to the back door and yelled, "Jimmy!"

Jimmy came into the kitchen. "Yes?"

David pointed. "Just what is all this junk doing in the breakfast nook?"

"Gee, dad, that isn't junk. They're carburetors. I have to soak them in that carburetor cleaning fluid. There's no heat in the garage and the light isn't good. They're delicate. I figured on working on them later."

"My roasting pan!" Susan yelped.

"Gee, ma, it was the only thing big enough," Jimmy said reasonably.

In the days that followed, Operation Ferritalia threatened to take over the entire house. The carburetors took over the breakfast nook, roller bearings and nuts and bolts and screws and washers soaked in distillate in Jimmy's room, connecting rods and wrist pins and pistons and rings and gaskets and cylinder head and pan and camshafts took over the basement. Lined up carefully were valves with a printed note: **DO NOT TOUCH ON PAIN OF DEATH**. Susan opened the oven one day to find a generator and starter inside.

"Drying out," Jimmy explained.

Getting a car into the garage was an impossibility, so the family sedan sat outside in the fall rains. "My four-thousand-dollar car sits out in that downpour," David screamed, "while that four-hundred-dollar pile of junk sits in the garage!"

The top to the Ferritalia disappeared. "Artie Hansen's uncle is a sailmaker," Jimmy explained. "He's going to put on a new top for just the cost of the material." The wheels followed the top. "We got 'em over at Contrero's Automotive, getting 'em re-chromed," Jimmy said.

Their food bills rose alarmingly, since very often three or four of the Cam Twisters stayed for dinner, so they could work on the car right afterward.

Strange boys arrived one Saturday afternoon and loaded the body of the Ferritalia on a truck. "Body men," Jimmy said, waving. "Pee Wee's dad has a body and paint shop. We can use his equipment if we pay for the materials." The body disappeared.

Then one Saturday afternoon the expressman arrived with a heavy package. "Harkness?" he asked.

David admitted it.

"One hundred and twelve sixty-two. Collect."

"What?" David yelled.

"Says right here." The man pointed with a finger. "From Italy."

"Take it back," David said.

"To Italy?"

Jimmy came running out of the garage. "They got here! Hey, fellows!"

The Cam Twisters poured out of the garage, crowded around the deliveryman; one of the boys got the box, and they tore into it. When the contents were laid bare, they looked reverently.

"What are they?" David said.

"Pistons."

"One hundred and twelve sixty-two," the expressman said, "worth of pistons."

"By the Lord Harry," David said, "this is the end! This is the absolute and final end! . . . Jimmy, what in the name of heaven do you mean by ordering one hundred and twelve dollars' worth of pistons from Italy?"

"And sixty-two cents," the man said. "Cash."

"We got it," Jimmy said.

"Where?"

"In the Number One cylinder." Jimmy went into the garage, and came back carrying a handful of greasy bank notes. He counted out one hundred and thirteen dollars. The man gave

Jimmy the change, looked at the box of pistons, shook his head and left.

"Come into the house, Jimmy," David said. He went into the kitchen. Jimmy followed him. "Now, kindly explain where you got one hundred and thirteen dollars."

"It's kind of a long story," Jimmy said.

"I have all afternoon," David said grimly.

"Well, you remember you were telling me about how a business gets started when a man doesn't have enough money?"

"No, but go ahead."

"He incorporates, you said. He puts up so much and then he gets some other guys to put up so much, and he gives 'em stock in the company. So I sort of incorporated."

"You incorporated?"

"Sort of. And you said that a man could buy back the stock when he got the money, so he'd own the whole business. So I sold eight shares to the Cam Twisters for twenty-five bucks a share. We had to have the pistons, dad," Jimmy explained.

"And what do the Cam Twisters get out of this momentous transaction?"

"Well, gee, they get the experience, and you said that if people doing the work have shares in the corporation, they work harder, you said. So I figured the fellows wouldn't lose interest if they had shares. So if there's something big on—you know—like a fancy school dance or a picnic, the stockholders can use the car on a rotation basis. See?"

"I think so," David said. "And have you figured out how you're going to buy back two hundred dollars' worth of stock in Operation Ferritalia?"

"Sure," Jimmy said. "I already talked to Mr. Freeman, at the bank. When the car is finished, he said he'd loan me two hundred on it. The payments would be about eighteen a month. You'd have to sign the note, he explained."

"Of course. And how do you figure on meeting the payments?"

"Well, when the car is finished, I can take over that long paper route across the river. They have to use a car out there, and I

already talked to Mr. Masterson, of the circulation department. I got it all figured out, dad."

"Great," David said.

"The tires will cost us sixty-four bucks, 'cause we got a buy on them, so that's one seventy-six for tires and pistons, and Mr. Contrero will do the chrome job on the wheels for nothing, 'cause the automotive editor of the paper is going to run a feature story on how we restored the car, and he'll take pictures in front of Contrero's Automotive, and so Mr. Contrero will charge it off to advertising, he said. See?"

"I think so," David said.

The word got around. Monday at luncheon, his boss looked across the table at him and grinned. "David, what's this I hear about you paying four hundred dollars for some white elephant that had to be towed into your garage?" Mr. Garber winked at the others around the luncheon table.

David turned red, and then, not knowing what else to do, assumed a lofty attitude. "Oh, I don't know whether it's such a white elephant."

"The thing didn't even have tires, I understand. Now, David, you do know that a car must have tires. You know those round rubber things that fit on the wheels." Mr. Garber was really enjoying himself.

"I know this," David said, quoting Jimmy, but not knowing what he was talking about: "this car has a six-cylinder, double overhead cam mill, and the sweetest torsion-bar suspension system you ever saw. Finned brake drums that will haul you down like hitting a brick wall. Boroni wheels, twelve-volt ignition system, and it'll run the pants off anything you characters drive." David got out of his chair. "Well, I have to get back to work."

Mr. Garber, stunned, watched David go out the door, and then he said, "Well, I'll be a striped mongoose!"

Several days later the pans full of parts left the kitchen and the basement. Lights burned late in the Harkness garage and quiet mumblings came from the boys. Jimmy became preoccu-

pied and answered in monosyllables, ate his food in an absent-minded manner and returned to the garage. Once, David asked him what the trouble was.

"No trouble," he said. "Fitting wrist pins."

"Honestly!" Molly said. "They act as if they're delivering a baby or something! They've got the garage door locked and you can't even see what they're doing."

Susan made great plates of sandwiches and poured out milk, and at nine each evening knocked on the garage door and handed the food through the door as if she were feeding prisoners.

"This entire household is revolving around that thing in the garage," David said. "There must be more important things in this world."

"Not to Jimmy," Susan said.

"You saw his report card last week?"

"Yes," Susan said. "I also remember seeing one of yours once."

"Nevertheless," David said, "he's going to finish that project out there and get back to doing his school work or I'll know the reason why."

"I already know the reason why," Susan said. "He's sixteen and a boy."

"Listen!" Molly said.

They listened. There was a backfire, then a muffled roar, and then a low, rumbling sound from the garage.

"It's running!" Molly said, awed.

"Thank heaven!" Susan said.

Half an hour later, Jimmy came into the house, his eyes shining. "Did you hear it? Oh, brother! We just turned it over and off she went. Eddie balanced a glass on the radiator cap, just like a Rolls. The sweetest thing this side of heaven."

"And when," David said, "is the unveiling of this heavenly thing?"

"Saturday afternoon," Jimmy said. "All we have to do is fit the body, the upholstery, the top, and assemble the rear end."

This seemed like a major undertaking to David, but he had learned not to question the workings of genius.

On Saturday afternoon David drove home, pulled into his driveway, put on the brake, stopped and nearly fell out of his car.

There, sitting in the garage, was a long, low car with sloping fenders, the finish a sparkling red. The wire wheels were shining like jewels, the top was almost a stark white, and spotless. David got out of his car. Jimmy and six other boys just stood and looked. Susan was standing to one side, tears in her eyes. Molly stood beside the boy she had called "a greasy goon," her arm linked through his. A gentle muttering came from twin exhaust pipes.

"There she is, dad," Jimmy said.

David looked. "Holy catfish!" he said. Even a man who knew nothing of motor cars could see the purity of design, could not fail to appreciate the knowledge and work involved in transposing an uninspiring hunk of metal which had to be towed, into this shining creation of grace and beauty.

"Twelve coats of lacquer, dad," Jimmy said. "Racing red. And look at this leatherwork." He opened the door. The thick red leather, rich and soft, had been patiently hand-sewn and fitted into the old cushions.

David ran his hand over the leather. He walked around in back. The spare tire had a handmade canvas cover, the same material as the top. A Cam Twister's emblem was bolted just under the license plate.

"When we get the engine run in," Harold White said, "it'll clock over a hundred, easy."

David turned away and went into the house. Susan followed him. "What's the matter, David?"

David rummaged in the cupboard and got a bottle of bourbon. He made two highballs, keeping his face averted. He handed one to Susan. "Let's have a small drink to Operation Ferritalia. Those kids." He shook his head.

"You'd better wipe your eyes," Susan said. "I think Jimmy wants you to take the first ride."

Fifteen minutes later Jimmy came into the kitchen. "Dad, we took a vote. We decided you should have the first ride."

"Thank you," David said. He went outside and got into the car. Jimmy eased the red beauty out of the garage and pulled out into the street. He went through the gears. The engine rumbled a sound of controlled power.

"Where you want to go, dad?"

"Drive," David said, "up Riverside Drive. I would like to stop at George Garber's place."

David's boss was out in his yard, putting sawdust around his plants. When he saw the Ferritalia pull up in front of his home and stop, he turned around, his expression that of a man who had just seen little green men climbing out of a flying saucer. He walked over to the car, walked around it, muttering to himself. He stopped beside David.

"A Ferritalia!" he breathed. "A 1937 Ferritalia."

"A pile of junk," David said. "A white elephant for four hundred bucks."

"Where in the world did you get it?" Mr. Garber said. "Why, I've been looking for one for ten years."

"In a barn," Jimmy said.

"We had to put tires on it," David said. "You know those round things that go on wheels?"

Mr. Garber stared at the car. He nearly drooled. "I don't suppose you'd want to sell it?" he asked plaintively.

"Afraid not," Jimmy said. "Dad and I worked too hard getting her in shape to want to sell her now."

Mr. Garber squinted at David. "You young squirt," he said, "leading me on, letting me think you didn't know a camshaft from a carburetor. Why, I ought to tie the can to you."

David grinned, sure of himself now. "If you do," he said, "we'll never give you a ride."

"Blackmail," Mr. Garber grunted. "I suppose if I made you second vice-president you'd even let me drive it."

"We'll think it over," David said. . . . "Let's go, Jimmy."

"You drive home, dad," Jimmy said. He got out from behind the wheel and went around the car.

David slid behind the wheel, put the car in gear and started rolling. The twin exhausts barked defiance at Mr. George Garber. David stared straight ahead as people watched them pass. Finally he turned to his son. "Pretty hot little mill," he said, "for a white elephant."

HEART ATTACK

By PAUL HORGAN

THEIR faces were blurred by fear. Though a young couple, they looked even younger as I passed them at the waiting room on the fourteenth floor of the hospital. I went by them, taking no time for anything but a nod. They both gave me their smiles, which I knew well. They'd been patients of mine for a year or two, Ned McMann and his wife, Dora. Now, early in the morning, he needed shaving, and she was pale. Yet they still looked like children in their heightened radiance of that energy which rises to meet the unknown and the terrifying—that energy which can express itself as fear, worry or courage. As a doctor, I have seen all its forms.

At the door of Room 1407 I found the nurse.

"Good morning, Doctor Crozier," she whispered.

"Hello, Miss Trumbull. I'm glad we got hold of you."

Her starch crackled over her plump and ardent figure, expressing satisfaction at my remark as we went together into the patient's room. After the dim yellow glow of the corridor, the light in the room was silvery and clear. The big window with its louvers of glass showed a long sweep of the East River. It was a wonderful view, and I vowed again to paint it someday—white

dawn sky, and white river, and rosy brick buildings across the water, and a blue haze in the distance.

I came around the bed and began to examine the patient, Mrs. Mildred Boothby. She was under a mild sedative. Miss Trumbull and the technicians had already taken a cardiogram. Her eyes were shut. They fluttered a little. She was awake and aware of me, but shocked into stillness, afraid to open her eyes and risk seeing an opinion in mine.

She was slender, delicately made and young-looking for her years. All dressed up, she would be pretty, in a gray-haired, beauty-parlored way. Now she seemed to me handsomer than that, in the pallid light and pearly shadow that modeled her face. Mrs. Boothby was in serious trouble, and a fatalistic dignity was exposed in her face and made it beautiful. She was Dora McMann's mother. They looked rather alike—the sort who enjoyed being taken more often for sisters than for mother and daughter.

Miss Trumbull handed me the chart and the electrocardiogram. I read what had already been done. It was all proper. The case was all clear, and familiar, and classic, so far as what was there to be seen. But much remained to be studied of what had brought the patient to this.

She presently opened her eyes. The eyes. How many have looked at me so? I think they never, except in nearness to love, speak so fully for the human spirit as when asking in silence of the doctor that question which lips can rarely say.

Her eyes were grayish-blue. I could not yet answer them. Instead I leaned near to her and spoke. "Mrs. Boothby, I am Doctor Timothy Crozier. Your son-in-law called me to take care of you. I want you to be very quiet and think of nothing but rest for a while. I'll see you several times a day—I'm on the staff of this hospital. This is Miss Trumbull, your first day nurse. I particularly asked for her. You are in very good hands with her"—subdued crackle—"and in a day or two we'll be able to make some plans together. Right now I don't want you to see anyone until you've had a nap. Dora and Ned are outside. I'll tell them

when to come back." I touched her hand. It was cool and dry. "Meanwhile, don't be frightened. We must all help each other. We can't do that if any one of us is afraid. Try to sleep now."

Without voice, she shaped the words, "Thank you, doctor," and, in the faintest of movements, nodded first at me and then at Miss Trumbull. I could not help smiling with satisfaction. Her small social gesture was her first step in the direction of life, since I had come to find her so near death.

I took Miss Trumbull to the hall for a word or two of special instructions. I knew her pretty well by now. Most people are five or six different persons. Miss Trumbull was fortunate. She was only two, and both were innocent. One was hungrily alive with breathing dreams of romance. Her big hazel eyes were often swimming with the moisture of sympathy or hope. Her round face was younger than it might have been for her years, but it was disarming and trustful, and if not beautiful, it was full of a snub-nosed wonder at the world. Within such kindly nonsense the other Miss Trumbull resided like an embodied spirit of skill and efficiency.

At the technical aspects of her work she was superior. So far as I knew, the first Miss Trumbull never lessened the effectiveness of the second.

"I needn't tell you," I said, "how closely this one needs watching."

"No, doctor. Isn't she a pretty little thing? Still so young for this to happen."

"Yes. I'll have to get some history before I will really be able to see very far ahead. Her young people are outside. I'll see them now. You can reach me all morning here. Doctors ought to be born with antennae growing out of their foreheads."

She always rose to even my poorest joke, and often enlarged it until it seemed to her deserving of a national audience.

"Oh, Doctor Crozier," she now said, "you ought to send that in. Every doctor would know just what you meant."

I nodded my thanks and left her, wondering where she thought I should send it. She never specified.

In the waiting room the young McManns were still sitting in silence, looking hungry and sick and—for two such handsome young people—almost ugly in their distress. They straightened up for me, coming to me on a social plane. They called me Tim, and we sat down together. I asked some questions.

I understood Mrs. Boothby had come from her home in Buffalo to visit them in New York. How long had she been in town?

She arrived last evening.

How had she seemed on arrival?

Simply fine, and so excited about coming, and she had bought lots of new clothes at home for the visit, which they all thought so funny, when New York was the place to buy clothes. She had seemed younger than ever, and she and Dawda felt so close.

Dawda?

It was a family nickname for Dora and it stood also for baby-talk meaning daughter—a survival of happy years long ago in Buffalo, before Mr. Boothby died, when every scrap of history in their lives was so heavy with meaning that surely could never dwindle.

So. When did Mrs. Boothby complain of feeling ill?

Why, the way it always was back home, where Millie was an early riser, Dawda went into her bedroom in the apartment here, taking a little tray of orange juice and coffee, which was all she ever wanted for breakfast, it was about a quarter to six.

Then the mother was staying with them here in their apartment?

Oh, yes. They wouldn't think of letting her go to a hotel, even though the apartment was so small. It was such a pretty place, and she had never stayed in it since they moved in two years ago. They all agreed she would be happier in their bedroom, while they slept in the big, really very comfortable couch that made up into a double bed in the living room.

Yes. And what did she say about herself this morning, then?

Why, she said she had the strangest pain running down her left arm. It came during the night, and she thought she fainted, and then she thought she was going to die, but everything came

back to her, and she felt so weak she didn't even try to call anyone, but she thought she must have fallen asleep.

Did she write often from Buffalo?

Oh, yes, every two or three days.

Did she ever, in her letters, mention feeling ill?

No, except just now and then a cold or that allergy she has in the sinus. Nothing else.

Any matters of worry that were known of? Long-standing ones?

No, financially she was without worries; years ago daddy had left enough to keep her comfortably the rest of her life. She had never mentioned any other kind of thing that might be troubling her. She was so proud of Ned, with his fine job at the publishing house, and she would give Dawda everything she had, if they'd let her.

The McManns were both coming back to themselves through the opportunity to talk of what had happened to Mrs. Boothby. Dawda was pretty again, with the elfin turn of the corners of her eyes and lips.

Ned always seemed larger than he was because he felt so big inside. His face was openly Irish, bearing a sort of fond truculence toward life. It was his ruling impulse to feel responsible for any living thing that suffered within his ken.

Now, unable to govern his charm even at dawn and in trouble, he cocked an eyebrow at me and said, "Tim, I hated to call you so early, but one look at Millie was all I needed."

"It wasn't too early to call, and I am hoping it wasn't too late."

They caught their breaths.

"Tell me," I added, "do you know of anything in the nature of a shock of any kind, large or small, that Mrs. Boothby may have encountered after arriving in town last evening?"

There was a little drag of time before either of them answered, an interval in which thoughts might be sifted and changed, and Dawda glanced swiftly at Ned, and he looked back at her and then each replied to me in turn, "No. Nothing."

I made myself remember that I must rely on clear evidence.

All I could weigh was what they told me. What—if anything—they chose not to tell me might lead to guessing. That could be dangerous or unfair. Still, I doubted their last replies.

Ned saved us all. He asked, "Tim, just what is the nature of Millie's illness? How bad is it?"

So I had to tell them.

They were scared by what they heard, but not until I said that they were not to see Mrs. Boothby till next day, and then only for a moment, did they grasp the delicacy of the issue.

Dawda suddenly crumpled, murmuring, "It cannot be—a heart attack, at her age!"

Ned seemed to be fighting mad. Alone, against overwhelming odds, he, somehow, would contrive to save his Millie. I was touched by both of them.

I said, "Get out of here. Go home and take baths and eat a big breakfast. I'll phone you this evening. We've not lost this thing yet, you know. I'll know more in a day or two. The damage will take a long time healing. We'll watch very closely for the first indication that things are starting to go our way. There are lots of factors that we may not yet grasp."

Dawda asked, "Does she know what happened to her?"

"Not just yet," I replied. "Some patients are frightened by the idea of cardiac disturbances. We'll pull her out a bit first. Then I'll talk it all over with her."

They left so awed by what could happen in their lives, without warning, in so brief a time, that they had nothing to say to each other.

Later in the day I returned to 1407. The patient was sleeping. Miss Trumbull came out to me in the hall.

"She wants to talk about something," she said. "Two or three times she put her fingers out to me and I came over, and she made words—you know?—with her mouth, but no sound. And then, when I would say, 'What is it, dear?'—why, then she would just turn away her head and look at nothing. So I wonder."

"What is on her mind, then, Miss T.? Have you any idea?"

"Well, she is attractive, and she's not too old to be very at-

tractive to the right kind of middle-aged gentleman, so maybe she has had an emotional disappointment in someone who——” But she cut this off when she saw what I thought of it. There was so much of herself in the theory that Miss Trumbull must save it from open ridicule. “Anyhow, doctor, I think she is in shock from something, and just simply cannot bring herself to tell.”

“Try to find out for me.”

“Yes, doctor.”

“Don’t discuss this part of it with the nurses of the other two shifts. If we get anywhere on this, it’ll be you who’ll do it.”

She breathed deeply and nodded. She longed to help someone with her heart as well as with her skill.

There were no developments until the evening of the second day, when Ned and Dawda came for the first time to see Millie. They had been there for ten of their permitted fifteen minutes when I arrived. Miss Trumbull was there, too, for she had arranged to take the shift from four to midnight, because it was in those hours, she believed, that the restless spirit was most lonely.

The young people received me with extra-good manners. They were insistently considerate of Miss Trumbull too. Suffering miseries of nerves and dread, they were doing their best to make a hospital room into something else—a place where happiness and good fortune might rightfully abide. They trotted out their best selves for me and Miss Trumbull, as if we had powers of propitiation and thus could intervene against death on behalf of *such nice people*. . . .

But there was something in their behavior toward each other that did not ring true. They were all politeness, one to the other, but they never exchanged looks. In their efforts to enact the parts of two devoted relatives come to bring hope and cheer to a beloved invalid, they made the heart sink a little instead. Miss Trumbull caught my eye. Indicating first the young couple with a glance, and then Mrs. Boothby, she contrived to express professional doubts about the effect of their presence upon the pa-

tient. She followed this with a restrained nod that seemed to promise me some news when she could deliver it.

"I'm getting up a list of shows," said Ned, "that Millie will want to see when we get her out of here."

"That'll mean new clothes," said Dawda. "New York clothes. We love to shop together."

Mrs. Boothby seemed wary of yielding to so much optimism, which was in danger of sounding false. But she hungrily looked from one to the other of her children, searching for strength and authority in someone else that would promise how everything was going to be all right. Everything. From being head of that small, strenuous and passionately opinionated family, she had been swiftly reduced to a state of childhood, dependent and subject. Yet like a child she could detect the difference between reassuring promises that were sincere and those that were not. Just for an instant her face showed the qualms that suddenly wavered across her heart, causing physical pain. No one saw this but me. Ned had pulled out of his wallet a picture of a caliber .30-.30 rifle taken from a catalogue.

"Look at that, Tim. You've never seen anything so pretty. I just got one. I want you to go off some weekend with me and try it out. Oh, brother. For next deer season."

"Yes. . . . Now you'd both better pop out of here. Say good night nicely to my patient."

They were dismayed.

"But we've just come! I brought Momma some——"

"Good. Good. Tomorrow evening for the same few minutes. Off you go."

"Is there anything we can——"

"Thank you, no."

Miss Trumbull had the door open for them, and they kissed their hands at Mrs. Boothby, and smiling over their ruefulness they went, leaving the effect of a ruined party.

Why, I wondered, should this be so? And I knew that it was so because between them all existed something false. Some betrayal was being denied. This created work for everyone. My

patient was to be spared all effort. I had a small surge of resentment. I went about my tasks with Mrs. Boothby, examining her, checking the records of the tests that were given daily, and studying the chart. The chart showed every sign of careful recording. It told me little. What I was looking for could not be written there. I could feel Mrs. Boothby watching me. I initialed the chart with a brisk scratch of my pen and gave it over to Miss Trumbull with a bright nod. We were all required to do a job of acting. All but Mrs. Boothby. She turned her head away on her pillow and gazed at some reality that only she saw. By her look, it might kill her.

I left her with a little pat of encouragement. Miss Trumbull found me waiting in the hall a couple of minutes later, as she knew she would.

"Well?"

"Yes, doctor. I found out something. Those two. I could shake them."

At my nod, she told me the story. Late that afternoon Mrs. Boothby took Miss Trumbull's hand and asked if she minded if she told her something. She wanted to speak of the kind of thing you could only tell to a lifelong friend or a total stranger. Miss Trumbull pressed her hand.

Mrs. Boothby wept for a moment at the marks of concern and kindness that came to her through the desolation that held her in a hospital bed. The night she arrived in New York everything was so lively. "The children" simply bowled her over with the enthusiasm of their welcome. She asked herself why she had not come much sooner to visit them, for seeing them together, married so wonderfully, and so devoted to her, she had for the first time in years a settled feeling in her heart, a feeling that everything in the years ahead was going to be wonderful. At the same time—she risked a ghostly smile as she spoke of it—life in New York must certainly be stimulating, for the children seemed hectic, nervous, almost forced in their affection and gaiety—but she dismissed such a thought, knowing how overwrought she might

be herself with so much excitement. Her heart could have burst with joy.

They sent her to bed about midnight, after a few convivial drinks. She heard them moving about, preparing their bed in the living room. They had never used it before. She wondered if they were enlivened at sleeping together in a new place—almost like a miniature second honeymoon. She knew she would have been, years ago, in such a circumstance with Mr. Boothby. Anyway. There was a strange sort of silence out there in the living room, after all the hilarities of the evening. Without a word, Dawda and Neddie went to bed. Or perhaps the door was so thick that if they were talking, Mrs. Boothby could not hear them. But as quiet descended on the pretty little apartment, she could hear the banjo clock ticking away over the living-room mantel. Out of delicacy, to avoid overhearing even the casual privacies of her little family, Mrs. Boothby covered her ear with a pillow, and so fell asleep.

The pillow must have fallen away later, for she awoke to the chirp and rumble of subdued voices. She smiled drowsily at the happiness of two young people so dear to her, and meant to go to sleep again. But now a word, and again a phrase, and finally a full flow of talk cut through to her consciousness.

It was not only the words but also the way they were said. They were said with so much bitterness and—yes, so it sounded—hatred, that Mrs. Boothby felt a stab in her breast. They were trying to keep quiet, so she could not hear them, but never having used their rooms separately, they could not know how their voices carried, and what she was hearing was a quarrel whose venomous energy came through clearly to her. The children were slashing at each other with personal complaints, and taunting each other with plans for separate lives whenever they could manage a divorce. At one moment Mrs. Boothby heard Dawda caution Ned to keep his rich, grainy voice down, and then it came out that they had agreed not to spoil her visit by letting her know anything of their plans.

They would pretend that all was happy until she was at home

again, for they both loved her, and hated to hurt her. Well, she thought they might as well have told her the end of the world was here.

She had the impulse to call out to them, but some dreadful power suddenly held her and pressed the breath back into her mouth. Her chest was crushed by a massive weight. Pains rayed from the center of her heart in every direction. She fainted. Presently she came to, and thought she was dying. But there was now a terrible calm to her pain, which seemed to hold her fast in silence to the bed. She listened. All was perfectly still in the other room. For three hours she lay impaled by pain on the wreckage of her life. Then morning came, and Dawda came in with her fruit juice and coffee, and so they found her.

"Isn't it really?" said Miss Trumbull. "I keep thinking and thinking, what could be the trouble between those two darling little people."

"Didn't Mrs. Boothby indicate?"

"No; she got tired, so I made her be quiet."

"Good, Miss T. Does it excite her to talk this way to you?"

"I won't say 'excite,' really, but she feels it. She cried, sort of quietly, once or twice. Should I let her talk?"

"I—think so. Yes. Let her say all she can to you. She is not gaining on this condition as she should be doing. If there's something more on her mind, let her at least get it off to you. It must help. You are a great help, Miss T.; do you know that?"

Her wide breast rose and fell at this in a gust of gratitude at being appreciated. She so frankly gave her feelings forth to me that she made me feel obscurely guilty for being interestingly married, with a small, sometimes dismaying family.

"I'll keep on being, too, Doctor Crozier, you can believe Rometta Trumbull on that one!"

She disguised her emotion by assuming a stern, athletic air, and retired to the sickroom.

The next evening she had another story for me. Mrs. Boothby was enough rested to reveal more. She now related what seemed

to be the causes of the children's breakup. Miss Trumbull was full of wrath over these, not because they were so shocking and sensational but because they were so petty. She felt cheated of all the grand emotions.

Ned was not pursuing other women—at least, not according to the complaint. He drank, but not unmanageably. He was not ungenerous with his money. As for Dawda, she was not seeing another man. She was not reproached for being what so many articles discussed in print lately—frigid, that was it. She did not neglect her appearance. The children reproached each other along such lines as these:

Why did he have to bring his work home every evening? He did nothing but sit around reading manuscripts whenever she felt like going out.

Very well, what about her committees and clubs, the things that kept her so busy all day that when he came home in the evening, she had nothing ready for him in the way of a good dinner, so they had to go around the corner to that fake Italian place?

It seemed to her, then, that whenever he had to go out of town, he deliberately arranged to leave her behind. He went off on publishing business; he went hunting every chance he got, or fishing; he even went off on golf tournaments without her. What did that do for her?

All right, he didn't think he was particularly the delicate sort, but on those rare occasions when she did have dinner at home, she left the dishes till the next day, which seemed to him disgusting, aside from being unsanitary. In this connection, he said only a sloven could behave that way.

She begged his pardon, and asked if sloven did not mean the same thing as slut.

He thought it did.

So it had come to this—that her husband should call her a slut.

He sighed offensively and said there was a woman's logic for

you, as he had not called her a slut, or even a sloven, but had only made a comparison.

The distinction was too nice for her grasp, then, and if he was talking about personal habits, she might ask him what made him think it was a pleasure for her to see him lounging about wearing only his shorts—and so forth, for what seemed to Mrs. Boothby hours of the bitterest wrangling. It was the squalid triviality of such charges that hurt her so to hear, for the children seemed to be searching for something—anything—to support deeper resentments that seemed to have emptied their hearts of any true feeling for each other. And the final horror was the plain indication that after they had made a fool of Mrs. Boothby by giving her a falsely happy vacation, they would be divorced. Ned said that when that time came, he knew his mother-in-law would agree with him in his complaints, for she understood him and he adored her.

Dawda replied that if he thought that, he was more thick-headed than she thought him to be, for, after all, they were talking about her own mother, who would never, never let her down.

Between them, hammering away at the humble commonplaces of which their world was made, they brought it tumbling down, and with it, the world of someone else who had never dreamed that it could ever fall.

Miss Trumbull said, "I asked her why she didn't just speak to the children about everything? 'Oh, no!' answered Mrs. Boothby, 'I have never discussed their personal lives with them unless they led the way. I couldn't. Not even now.'"

I thought that at this point I knew all I had to know about my patient and the complexities of the case. But this was not yet true.

"She says she wants to talk to you, alone," said Miss Trumbull.
"What about?"

"I don't just know, except that she said it was about the future, and something about the children."

"I'm not entirely certain I can do anything about the children. Have they been here yet this evening?"

"No, doctor."

"Good. I'll see her now. You watch for them and keep them out of here till I send for them."

I went in to see Mrs. Boothby.

About twenty minutes later I came out. Miss Trumbull was loyally on guard. She searched my face to invite me to tell what Mrs. Boothby had said to me. She saw that I was much moved by something. Great questions in Miss Trumbull's best vein of romantic fantasy hovered between us. I couldn't answer them—not just at the moment, anyhow, and so she risked an impropriety.

"So, then, doctor?" she said, nodding archly toward the door of 1407.

"In half the cases we see, it's what isn't in the chart that counts," I said. "This is one."

She took a breath. Evidently I had coined another professional epigram.

"Oh, doctor, you should send that in."

"Thank you, Miss T. Did the children show up?"

"Yes, doctor; they're in the waiting room."

"Then I'll see them there."

She clasped her hands. She felt something coming. So did I.

It was a trifle exasperating not to know, since I was already involved in the personal difficulty of the children, just how firmly they meant their decision. Yet when I thought of how much we cannot account for in the lives of those we know even most intimately, I could do nothing now but accept without speculation whatever I saw and heard of the behavior, past, present and future, of Ned and Dawda.

In the waiting room I found them in their separated concerns. He was reading a bundle of manuscript held on top of his leather dispatch box. Across the room, she was leaning over the back of a sofa, gazing out the window at the lights along the

river far below and away. There was no one else there. I shut the waiting-room door after me and turned the bolt. They both looked up in surprise at this, and then alarm. I indicated three chairs in a corner.

"Come and sit here with me," I said. "For what we have to say to each other, we must feel close together."

Dawda came rapidly forward in a panic. "Is she——" she asked in a husky whisper.

"No, there is no change, really. But that in itself is not good, when we are looking for a trifling but consistent improvement every day."

"Oh, thank God," she said. "I thought she may've died."

They sat down, side by side, facing me.

"I do not propose," I said, "to speak of your private affairs for the simple pleasure of it. It happens that these are now openly involved with the case you have entrusted to me. I must therefore discuss them with you."

They exchanged a glance. It was a married sort of look, and it gave me a turn of feeling for them both. In spite of all their famous efforts to hurt each other, they were still in league. Scared of what I might know, they turned to each other out of habit. She nodded at Ned, and he took charge.

"Just what are you referring to, Doctor Crozier?" he asked stiffly.

"Mrs. Boothby overheard a quarrel of yours the night she arrived. It quite literally broke her heart."

"She heard everything?" asked Dawda sorely.

"Everything. It gave her relief to tell Miss Trumbull. Miss Trumbull, who was bound to report to me anything related to the medical aspects of the case, told me."

Dawda crumpled her hand against her lips. "Oh, no!" she said. "That we should have done this awful thing to Millie—— We—— we did not dare let ourselves believe so."

"Tell me," I asked; "I suppose it is to be assumed that she may believe what she heard?"

Ned's face turned hard and blank.

Dawda turned away from him and said, "Yes, of course. We are going to be divorced, but we wanted to tell her later, when we could prepare her for it gradually."

"I see. So now, as a result, there is a life at stake. And what a life. I don't think either one of you can really appreciate it."

Ned glared. Who was I to instruct him about his mother-in-law?

"I'll explain that further," I said. "I've just come from a little talk with Mrs. Boothby. I think you must hear what she said to me."

They listened in growing pity and shame.

Mrs. Boothby told me she knew very little about medical matters, but she supposed she had had a stroke, and she knew that another one often must follow. The next one, she believed, would come along at any time, and when it came, if it left her alive, she knew it would leave her a hopeless invalid for life. She knew of some who had lived for years in such condition. For the past days she had prayed and prayed that she might be reconciled to that when it should happen to her, and she thought she was now ready to face it. But she had to ask me when I thought this might happen, for she had some arrangements to make first—terribly important ones—and she must have my permission and my help to make them.

Mrs. Boothby went on to say that with things as they were now between "the children," she must plan her future so as not to be a burden on either of them. She was sure Ned would marry again, and she would have no claim on any future life of his. As for Dawda, Dawda would have to work, and so could hardly be asked to take care of an invalid the rest of her life. As soon as possible, Mrs. Boothby wanted me to arrange for her to be established in a nursing home at East Aurora, near Buffalo, where they took old people and cases like hers. She thanked God she could tell her lawyer to take care of the cost out of her life income. What a kind and provident man Mr. Boothby had been. Now she was glad to have been able to tell me all this, and it was time for me to tell her what the outlook was.

"Oh, Ned," said Dawda, turning her face in upon her shoulder to hide from the unbearable information I gave, "she was thinking only of us."

Of course, I was able at once to assure Mrs. Boothby that she had not suffered a stroke, and that the future she was preparing for in such loneliness, patience and submission need not be anticipated. But I was also obliged to tell her that she had suffered severe damage to her heart, and that recovery could come only through long and complete rest, in which peace of mind must play a great part.

"What did she say to that?" asked Ned.

"She was naturally relieved, until she remembered the rest of it. Then she turned away from me because she knew she had trouble to carry with her. She could feel nothing reassuring about it. The same trouble that put her here."

The idea of Mrs. Boothby lying in bed for these days, thinking her thoughts and preparing to leave free those two whom she loved was too much for them both. But they were too stubbornly shy to let their eyes meet, and so betray the feelings that began to stir in them again.

"I wonder," I said, "if you'll let me make a remark."

They swallowed at me and nodded.

"Well, if Mrs. Boothby was ready to accept her life that way for years to come, doing her best not to bother anyone in the course of it, perhaps you could manage to accept each other as you are—for a while, anyhow. Who knows what might not come of it?"

Pride, pride. It is a stone to swallow. Ned was obliged to say, "Are you talking about a matter that concerns only my wife and me?"

"It is supremely a matter of indifference to me personally whether you stay together. But I am forced, in the interest of my patient, to raise the question."

"You consider it desirable, then."

"I should say decisive—for my patient."

Dawda appealed to me with brimming eyes that pleaded for forgiveness. It was not my place to forgive her.

The two of them hung apart in their teeming thought for another moment, and then they broke. They were now without pretenses before me. He took her in his arms. He bent his head on top of hers. They were enfolded in all the sweeping affirmations of a private eternity which they pledged together. *The poor, loving fools*, I said to myself. In my professional position I must neither disapprove nor approve the moral positions of men and women whom I might meet on a case. But of course I had now done both, in turn.

Dawda pushed herself free and asked, "Can we see her?"

"Do you think it would be good for her?" I asked, for it was necessary to be sure. They answered me in silence. "Very well," I said, "whenever you like, but only for a few minutes."

I left them.

Later I had the benefit of Miss Trumbull's observation of what happened.

The children went to Mrs. Boothby. They didn't know how to say what they had come to say. Painful revivals would be risked. Sheepish admissions must ensue. It was all done most naturally and swiftly when Dawda burst into tears, and then everything came out between them all. Miss Trumbull thought for a moment that it might be bad for Mrs. Boothby, who began to cry, too, but with happiness, and Miss Trumbull herself had a lump in her throat. The children kissed each other, and said they were going out on a date that evening, just the two of them, to celebrate how well Millie was going to recover from now on. Miss Trumbull said it stopped her breath just to see how those two looked at each other then, after all those other times of hardly glancing at each other, and she said they seemed to almost jump up and down with impatience to be out of there and off together, just the two. It gave her a notion.

"Something occurred to me—the way things do sometimes—you know, doctor. I had a *nidea*."

"An idea?"

"Well," she said, "don't you think perhaps, this was a heart attack, too, but another kind? I mean, the way those two sort of just fell in love with each other right then, all over again, when they had that reason to admit and be sorry for their errors? Do you see? Heart attack?"

She looked both anxious and modest, a creative artist at the moment of revelation. My opinion seemed important to her. I undertook to do the handsome thing.

Having been well taught, I said, "Miss T., that's very good. You ought to send that in."

THE CONSCIENCE OF THE COP

By WILLIAM FAY

THE MAN who had attempted to hold up the liquor store had fallen forward when Heidig shot him and he was dead on the sidewalk in the sweet summer evening. He wore a lightweight suit, cream-toned and attractive, with the crease still fresh at the back of the pants. Cars were stopping along Eighth Avenue.

"You did it real nice and quick," the other detective said to George Heidig. "You made no mistakes."

"Thank you, Morris."

"You're two thirds of a sergeant already," Morris said, not in envy, but in professional appraisal. It was the way the thing had happened. Morris, as the driver of the car, had of necessity taken ten or fifteen seconds longer getting to the scene. "You were very good, George."

"I was tremendous," Heidig said.

He was still taking deep breaths, looking down at the man he had shot. *About my own age*, Heidig thought; *thirty years old—thirty-one?* He didn't look like a thief or a punk. His leg-horn hat, with a gay red ribbon around it, had rolled as far as the curb. He had reddish-brown hair that made him look Irish. The lights from the liquor store kept the pavement so bright

you could count the dead man's freckles. Heidig could not see his victim's face, but neither could he forget the one brief glimpse of it that had been stenciled in his mind. He could hear the sirens of two patrol cars, loud and insistent, almost here.

"His name was Harrigan," Morris Lerner said. "Gerald F. Harrigan, accordin' to a light-and-gas bill that he should have paid three months ago. Three twenty—the other number's smudged here—Columbus Avenue. That would be uptown. You all right?"

"I'm all right, Morris," Heidig said. "I hope I'm all right. I never killed a man before."

Now the crowd was very big, encircling the body that lay in the vivid light. The uniformed cops from the patrol cars established a circle of privacy. Morris Lerner had picked up the small automatic and marked it, as routine required. There was nothing to do but wait for the specialists from Homicide. The bright, gay hat of the dead man had been trampled.

"You want a cigarette?" Morris asked.

"Thanks," Heidig said.

He was steady enough. He hadn't been too scared through the whole episode. There was just this feeling that kept growing and getting bigger inside of him. It was half past eleven then.

Heidig got home at ten minutes after one. A big breeze swept the apartment, raising the curtains like summer skirts, as though you were sailing up the Hudson on an excursion boat. It was a new apartment in a downtown municipal project. The space was right and the price was right: four and a half rooms, \$77.50. You could look south to the Brooklyn Bridge or north beyond the United Nations. Sheila had left a light on in the living room so he wouldn't slide on the rattan rug. The three kids were asleep, lightly covered, in the larger of the bedrooms, one window closed, because the breeze from the north could get so muscular, even in July. Heidig heard the refrigerator click, then begin to hum in its easy way. *I'd like a beer*, he thought.

"George?" Sheila called.

He walked in, carrying his can of beer and an opener. She

had snapped on the lamp at her side of the bed and she was sitting up, resting on one arm, watching him, squinting and looking pretty, her hair in curlers. They hadn't had a real live argument in many weeks. Things were good with them. Heidig sat down on the bed, holding the beer can and the opener in one hand, putting his face into the warm, soft groove of her neck and shoulder.

"Hello, Dutchman," Sheila said. "You and your beer." She held him close.

"Hello," Heidig said, very softly, his face still against her, but he didn't say "Hello, Irish," in the usual way. There was a difference tonight. The word projected too easily the man on the sidewalk and his reddish hair and the clear Celtic freckles. Heidig used the opener on the beer can, forcing a small triangular hole in the tin. He passed the beer to Sheila, who took one determined swallow. It was a kind of ritual they had. She said she never minded him smelling of go-to-bed beer if she had a little bit of it herself. He sat watching her.

"You very tired?" she said.

"Not so tired."

"What then?"

"We had a little action tonight—Morris and I."

She put her hands behind her head, straightening some of the pins he had disarranged, her full lips pale from a lack of rouge on them, her eyes very watchful.

"Yes, George?"

"I killed a man," he said. "A stick-up on Eighth Avenue."

"Sweet, merciful Saviour," Sheila said. All the color was gone from her face. She moved instinctively closer. "It might have been you."

"It wasn't me. It was him. He looked like your brother Frank."

She watched him carefully, knowing the trouble was real. He had never come home like this before. "You want to talk about it, don't you, George?"

"I think so," Heidig said.

She got out of bed, and she looked very good in her nylon

nightgown. Heidig thought, *I'll be dead when I don't notice that.* She put three cups of water in a small percolator; then she walked with it to the stove and turned on a burner.

"Excuse me," Sheila said, then went in and looked at the children, as though it were a necessary thing to do. She came back. "Go ahead and talk," she told him softly.

"This fellow was coming out of the liquor store," Heidig said. "He had some money in one hand—twelve lousy dollars, it turned out—and an automatic pistol in the other. I was very close to him when I shot him."

Sheila put three measured tablespoons of coffee in the top of the percolator. "You're a policeman," she said. "This man had a gun. Why is it complicated, George?"

"I can't exactly say," he told her. "Or if I do know how to say it, I don't want to—yet." *Did I give him enough of a chance?* Heidig wondered. *Would he have shot me if I hadn't got him?*

"Please, George."

"It's trying to remember things as they really were that has me all mixed up. Something happened in one second and I don't know yet if I was right or wrong. All I know is—and this is the strange part—I liked him."

Sheila stared at him. "But that's insane, isn't it? How can you like or dislike a man in one second?"

"You get an impression," Heidig said. "A guy is dead and you remember him—the expression on his face—and you like what you remember. I'm stuck with that. His name was Harrigan. He had a wife and two kids."

"That's laying it on," Sheila said. "Anyone can have two kids. Did he love them the way that you love ours? Would he go out with a gun in his hand if he was what he should have been?"

"He had no criminal record, far as we know. I learned that much. He was a very tidy dresser; he'd make Morris or me look like a bum. And all he had on him was a light-and-gas bill, three months' overdue. He had a silly grin on his face, like Frank sometimes, when Mabel finds out he's been drinkin'."

"Did you see his wife and children, George?"

"Oh, no! Somebody else checks that; then calls it in. That much is routine. The liquor-store clerk was no help. He was old and too scared. There's just the one thing has its teeth in my conscience."

"Say what you want to say, George."

"I keep thinking he wouldn't have shot me," Heidig said slowly, almost recitatively. "That he'd have dropped the gun and the stinkin', petty-larceny twelve dollars on the sidewalk, if I'd waited. I keep thinking that perhaps I murdered him, and I'd feel like I stuck a knife in you and the kids and spat on God, if that was true."

"Stop it!" Sheila screamed.

So he stopped. She fell against him, and they held together, swaying, slowly rocking in intimate expression of things they felt but could not speak. Her eyes were wet against his face, and Heidig, who had never before been weak, was grateful to have it this way.

"I've got tomorrow off," he said. "I'll look around. I'll find out things."

"You're tormenting yourself, that's all; and you're imagining."

"I've got to know," he said.

"But you couldn't have done anything too wrong. Not you, George."

"I wonder," Heidig said.

It was almost noon and the sun had climbed like a hot balloon. There wasn't a breeze worth a sick man's sneeze on Columbus Avenue. The Harrigans lived in one of a group of flats above a vegetable market, a shoe-repair shop and a corner bar and grill. The smell of bananas was richer than perfume in the heat. Heidig pushed a downstairs buzzer under a mail slot labeled HARRIGAN. There was no response. The downstairs door was open. Heidig walked up a flight and knocked on Apartment C. He waited. He tried the next apartment—B. No answer. Only A responded.

"Yes, sir?"

"Do you know the Harrigans?"

"I know them." She was a thin, tired woman in a house dress. There was captive sweat in the lines of her neck. She pushed her hair back, watching him. "Well?"

"I'm a policeman."

"I can't help you. What was their business isn't mine."

She closed the door. Heidig was going to obstruct this action with his foot, but he did not. The time he was spending on his day off was his own. He didn't want a lot of shouting in the hall. The information he had on the Harrigans was preliminary and brief. The widow had been notified at this address. She had two children and was employed in some capacity at a place called The Copper Door, on 63rd Street. Heidig had a feeling a man's biography could best be rendered by neighbors who wanted to talk. And there were always enough of these.

He walked downstairs to the soiled street and the griddle heat of the day. The woman who had refused to speak with him was at her window, watching. *I'm an enemy already*, Heidig thought. The vegetable man sat half asleep under a patched green awning. Heidig walked away from the strong smell of bananas, deciding to try the bar and grill. It said MCBRIDE'S on the window.

"I'll have a glass of beer, please," Heidig said.

"Well, it's about the right weather for it." The bartender filled an eight-ounce goblet. "There now."

It was a real nice glass of beer in nice surroundings, Heidig thought. McBride's, like a thousand saloons in modest neighborhoods, had the restful substantiality not otherwise available to a majority of its clients. It wasn't air-conditioned, but the fans turned effectively, almost silently under the spotless, corrugated, white-painted tin of the ceiling. There were a half-dozen men at the bar, two of them reading the morning papers. Most of them looked at Heidig without special interest, yet he knew that talk had been suspended. The bartender came back, carrying empty glasses. He was a man in his thirties, tall, proficient, cool-looking.

"Fill it again, sir?"

"I wouldn't mind," said Heidig, watching him. "You know a family next door—name of Harrigan?"

"Jerry?"

There were intimacy and feeling in the way the one word had been spoken. It controlled the moment. The total attention of each man present was involved. They all looked at Heidig. The bartender stared at his own hands, flat on the bar—studiously, as though he had never seen them before.

"Are you a cop?"

"That's right," Heidig said. "It's why I asked the question. I figured you might have known him."

"Know Jerry?" The bartender's smile was wistful. He turned to the others present. "Did we know the sweetest guy uptown?"

"Lay off the corn and the sirup," Heidig demanded. But the weight of despair was with him. It was like a gamble taken and lost. You couldn't alter what might be true by screaming aloud that it was barroom sentimentality. You couldn't whine like a child for a change of rules when you found what you feared you might find.

"You asked about a friend of mine," the bartender said. "I didn't ask you." He took Heidig's fifty-cent piece and rang up two beers on the register. "We're supposed to be happy because a cop shot Jerry dead?"

"I didn't say that." *Easy now*, he warned himself. "How long did you know Harrigan?"

"Six, seven months. He was from Massachusetts. He came down lookin' for a break. A helluva break he got—him with his talent."

"What do you mean 'talent'?"

"He was a streamlined Jackie Gleason," the bartender said. "Ask them. Ask anybody here that knew the guy. Laugh? . . . How about that, Phil?"

"I don't want to talk about it," said the man named Phil. "Not to the cops. Not to anybody. What's personal is personal. You mind?"

"That's up to you," Heidig said.

"Exactly, officer. It's up to me."

The man named Phil was bulbously large. He swamped the bar stool that supported him. His thighs made his capacious pair of khaki pants look tighter than bologna skins. The sweat worked through the weave of his T shirt. His heavy hands were eloquent. For a man who didn't wish to talk, he managed to say a lot.

"Do you play the piano, officer?"

"No," Heidig said.

"Or sing?" Phil said.

"Look, I'm not being questioned here."

"You asked us if Jerry Harrigan had talent, didn't you?"

Heidig's silence conceded that. He took another swallow of beer. It tasted less good than it had before. The heat of the day was rising. Heidig's head began to ache. The man named Phil controlled the stage.

"Jerry'd sit there at the piano—any night. You'd think his fingers were part of the keyboard. Name it, he would play it—sweet, hot, boogie, the Eyetalian mambo. Sing like his mother was a nightingale or a bird. Tell stories? Even a cop'd laugh, fall down in a stitch when Harrigan cut loose. It's just he never got a break. Know what I mean? Three months ago he came in second on a teevee talent contest. Everybody in this bar here saw the show. Jerry was robbed o' first prize. Good times or bad, he'd wear that grin like it was painted on his face. Good times or—"

"All right, hold it," Heidig said.

"You don't like the way I tell it?"

"I get the idea. He was the sweetest kid since Little Boy Blue, but he carried a gun last night. He held up a liquor store. Why? Did he work for a living?"

"Show business. That's what we told you," Phil said. "Happy-go-lucky an' quick with a buck. Is that a crime?"

"Who supported his kids?"

"Ask his ghost," said Phil, with a great sense of theater. He

was a gifted, dangerous cornball, Phil, and Heidig suddenly hated him—almost as much as he was learning to hate himself. "Ask the cop who shot him dead."

It hurt very much, and Heidig thought, *They're ahead of me.* He turned to the bartender then, hoping to change the trend of the evidence. "Did you know Harrigan's wife?"

"I'd see her around," the bartender said, "but she never came in here. A big straw blonde, she could knock down a wall. Jerry never talked about her. He never laid his troubles on the bar."

"She was no help to his career," Phil said.

Heidig didn't want to talk to him. He turned again to the bartender. "There's nobody at the apartment. Where would I find her? Where would I find the kids?"

"Try the old lady," he was advised.

"Whose old lady?"

"Jerry's mother-in-law. The name's Delaney. Around the corner. The first house, with the tailor in the basement."

Heidig walked out into the thumping glare. The sun was high enough to fry the streets and shrink the shade. A truck, half stacked with kegs of beer, had parked outside McBride's place in a bus-stop area. The driver, awash with sweat, walked around to the side of the truck. Heidig knew him from other neighborhoods.

"I'll only be a few minutes, George."

"It's all right," Heidig said.

He pushed the downstairs button where it said DELANEY. The stairs were steep in the converted brownstone house. It was cool and dark and damp within the narrow stairwell.

"Mrs. Delaney?"

"Who is it?"

"I'm a policeman, Mrs. Delaney."

She stood in the open doorway, and you couldn't say that she was fat, because there wasn't enough of her. She was round, small-boned, erect. Her eyes were a blue that Heidig had never seen before, and they were very beautiful.

"Can I help you?"

He stepped inside. The inevitable summer dust danced in slanted sunlight that the shades could not exclude. There were two kids standing near the window—small boys, anywhere from four to six. They wore nothing but shorts and sneakers in the heat, but they looked healthy, like boys at a summer camp. They kept watching him with such alert and friendly interest that Heidig was obliged to look away. There was a small oak table in the center of the room, polished and clean. There was a worn rug on the floor and on the walls he could see the treasures of the respectable Irish poor, a "God Bless Our Home," in lacy lettering, a picture of the Sacred Heart.

"Won't you sit down, officer?"

"The Sixteenth Precinct—West 47th Street," he said, avoiding any disclosure of his name. He sat down. "About last night," he said.

"Let's remember the children and not say what it wouldn't be right to say," Mrs. Delaney reminded him. She sat at the table.

"Yes, ma'am," Heidig said. "The fact is I'd like to talk with the children's mother—if that's possible."

Mrs. Delaney placed one hand on the table. "My daughter isn't here." She looked cautiously at the children, then leaned forward. "A stranger might think—he might imagine Mary didn't care much, not to be here at a time like this."

"He might, at that," said Heidig. "Anyone might." He took out a large, sodden handkerchief and wiped his face. "You mind if the children stepped into another room, Mrs. Delaney?"

"But there's only this room. This and the kitchen there."

"M'm'm'm," he said. "Well, could they step outside?"

She looked at him appealingly. "Into the street? With all the talk that's going on about what happened? With them not prepared yet for the things they'd hear?"

"Well, I see what you mean," he conceded. "Where is your daughter, Mrs. Delaney?"

"She went to her place of business." Mrs. Delaney, sitting

amid her variety of pious pictures, did not seem comfortable with this subject. "She has a temporary position—sort of."

"Do you mean she's working at The Copper Door?"

"I think that's the name."

"Is it a saloon?" he asked.

"I've never been there," she said. "Only please don't get the wrong impression—about Mary, I mean."

The older of the children had approached the round oak table carefully, and now stood next to his grandmother. "My father got hurt," the boy announced. "My father can sing and he can fight. He was on television once."

"Please, Jerry," Mrs. Delaney said.

It was too much for Heidig, who got up and walked to the door. The woman walked with him, making no comment. Heidig turned to her then and desperately asked, "What kind of a person was your son-in-law, Mrs. Delaney?"

Her pale face told him nothing, but her lips began to tremble. "Must you do this? Must you do it now?"

Heidig walked slowly down the stairs to the street. The same big truck, with a diminished load of beer kegs, was leaving the bus-stop area. The significance of this had not yet registered with him. He went into McBride's to look up the number of The Copper Door in the Manhattan directory. Every man in the place was watching him. He stared from face to accusing face, then understood; they had learned his identity. The man named Phil, with his affinity for the role, was impatiently ready to be the spokesman for the group.

"You never told us you were here to take a bow," Phil said. He raised a morning tabloid in his hand. "The same cop with his name in the paper."

"What about it?"

"The man o' the week," Phil said with deliberate scorn. "The people's friend." The hammy stagecraft of the man was maddening. "It won't bring Jerry back to us, will it, officer?"

"Lay off it!" Heidig warned him.

The enormous man stepped closer. "You don't like it and we

don't like it." Phil gestured grandly with his arms. "These were Jerry's friends. We don't none of us like it. We've seen trigger-happy cops before."

Heidig hit him then. He did it automatically, with reckless rage, in response to the soaring need within himself. He hit him cleanly, so that the big man staggered, falling back before he came at Heidig, roaring obscenely, his vast arms raised. Heidig hit him a second time with measured impact, dropping the barroom champion to the barroom floor. No one challenged this action. They were motionless at the bar. The man named Phil looked up at Heidig from where he was sprawled. He remained there, with the stamp of defeat upon him.

God help me now if ever You're going to help me, Heidig prayed.

He didn't go directly to The Copper Door. He stood for a long while at the counter of a white-tiled orangeade and hot-dog dispensary on a crowded corner of 63rd. The diluted, ten-cent fruit drink had grown lukewarm from the heat of his hand. He was reflecting how, as a first-grade detective, he had displayed, in slugging Phil, the smooth, imperturbable intelligence of a graduate maniac. But the problem receded from his thoughts, yielding always to the greater one: *What kind of a man did I kill last night? Would Harrigan have fired at me?*

From where Heidig stood he had been able to watch the luncheon guests depart from The Copper Door. It was half past two. Heidig crossed the street. There was, logically enough, a copper door set handsomely into a remodeled, clapboard Cape Cod kind of façade—something new for 63rd Street. Heidig opened the door and stepped inside. It was air-conditioned, as advertised.

"May I check your hat, sir?"

"I'm not exactly a customer," Heidig said.

The slight girl stepped aside. There was a bar to the left and a dining area to the right. You descended three steps from the entranceway. There were hooked rugs on a dark-stained floor,

a lot of copper pots hung high, a spread of candlelight. It looked tea-roomish and respectable. A big girl, blond as the straw around a bottle of wine, stood at the single table still occupied, and she was totaling a check. She walked to the cashier's desk and then returned with change to the table. Her customers got up to leave. Heidig walked toward her.

"Mrs. Harrigan?"

She had been watching him. Her gaze was level and appraising. Her hands rested only tentatively on the dishes and glasses she had gathered to one side. The words of McBride's bartender, "she could knock down a wall," were sustained by her size, but not by the tiredness Heidig saw in her face. Her eyes were soft, and they were so inexpressibly sad he dared not look directly into them.

"I didn't want to break in while you were still working," Heidig said.

"You're the law, huh?" She began to pick up the things she had set aside. "Well, it's not your fault, and I don't disgrace too easily. They know me here." She cleared the table. "I'll be back."

Mrs. Harrigan walked well—her high hips rhythmic, but by no means on deliberate display. She returned in a moment, her hands behind her back, untying a doily-sized, frilly apron. She indicated a table near the door to the kitchen. There was a glass urn of coffee on a heater.

"Might as well sit here. A cup of coffee?"

"No, thanks," Heidig said; then he was sorry. His mouth was so dry he wanted to correct himself and say he would have the coffee, or anything else, and be grateful for it. "About your husband," he began, "I'm sorry."

"That's official, huh? From the department?"

"I said I was sorry, that's all. There's nothing wrong with someone saying he is sorry."

"Here, have the coffee, anyhow," she said. "You look like you need it. Are you new on the job or something?"

"No," he said, "I'm not new on the job." In his distress, he

tightened his fists and chewed his lips. He raised his eyes to meet her level glance. "I was on Eighth Avenue last night," he said. "Outside the liquor store."

It was as much as he could say. Mrs. Harrigan poured the coffee. She had a calm, easy way of doing things. She pressed the sugar toward him encouragingly. He looked at her now and his expression begged her understanding.

"You were the one?" she said. "Is that what you're trying to say?"

Slowly, miserably, Heidig nodded.

"You poor, poor slob." She spoke almost tenderly.

"Then you don't hate me?"

"Why should I hate you? What's the percentage? Is that why you came here—just to tell me you were the one?"

"That and other things," he said. "That and how I keep remembering the way your husband looked. It's like I tried to tell my wife last night. She thought I was crazy, but I told her I liked his face."

"He was a good-lookin' guy," Mrs. Harrigan said. "I'll swear to anyone he was good-lookin'." She stirred the cup of black coffee in front of her, raised it, drained it and put it down. "He had a nice smile, huh?"

Heidig stared at the top of the table. "I guess you know what I mean."

"I guess I do."

"I was in McBride's place today. You know—uptown? Next to where you live? They told me there what they thought of him. The bartender and a man named Phil. I kept trying to sell myself the proposition that they were laying it on, about the talents he had, and what a guy he was. I had to come here."

"He had a smile like a light switch, Jerry had," Mary Harrigan said softly. "Turn it off and turn it on, whenever it was handy, an' especially when he was scared. He made friends like a dog, wherever he went, and the only hand he bit was mine, when I stopped giving him money—when I threw him out!"

Heidig waited, hoping. There was no one else in the dining section. It was very still. The hat-check girl was gone. You could barely hear the voices in the bar.

"The talents he had? Sure he could play a piano. He could sing a song. He must have been a sensation in McBride's. He used to tell the kids what a fighter he was; then later, when they were asleep, he'd prove it by lickin' me, as big as I am. He had a talent for everything except finding a job that might spoil his beautiful clothes." Suddenly she raised her hands to her face, her shoulders shook. "God forgive me," she said, "I'm almost glad he's dead!"

He remained still. There was nothing he could say. The girl sobbed softly. Morris Lerner had come into the place and he was standing near the hat-check booth. The clock on a wall said it was ten minutes after three.

"You think I'm awful, don't you?" Mrs. Harrigan said. "A nice guy like you, a clean guy like you—to hear a woman say these things? Me, with two decent kids to raise? Do you think I'd want it to be true?"

"No, ma'am," he said.

"Then wish me luck."

He wished her luck and stood up. There seemed nothing more to say. He longed for his pockets to be fat with money, but that just didn't happen to honest cops. He pressed her hands and said, "You'll do all right. Your kids'll do all right." And then he hurried out.

He walked with Morris in the heavy heat along the shaded side of Broadway. They were silent for a while, but he said, "How did you discover The Copper Door?"

"Well, frankly, George," said Morris, "you were as hard to find as the City Hall. I went up to that address on Columbus Avenue because Sheila phoned and said she was worried. You punched a guy in a place called McBride's and they told me there you'd been to see a Mrs. Delaney. You can't beat the de-

partment's scientific methods, George. What did you learn about this Harrigan?"

"He was a bum—I think."

"That makes you feel better?"

Heidig stopped on the sidewalk. "Morris, look; don't rub it in. Whether the guy was a bum or he was a saint, the thing I didn't mention to you last night was this: Did I fire too soon? Could I have given him more time?"

"Yeah, I suppose so," Morris said, looking at him strangely. "You could have given him time to take that automatic apart and reload it."

"What do you mean?"

"I mean that Harrigan's gun jammed, George. I turned it in last night and I phoned for a report from Homicide this afternoon. You didn't fire too soon at all. You're lucky to be alive."

They walked slowly together in the summer afternoon. A little breeze came up from the south. It was a miserable breeze that hardly stirred the lazy dust of the day.

"I feel like I'm sailing up the Hudson," said Heidig expansively. "Come home and I'll open some beer."

THE WOMAN WHO WOULDN'T STAY DEAD

By GERALD KERSH

WHEN the mist comes up from the marshes in the Rother Valley and you do not know whether you are coming or going, best go to the Rother Valley Hotel.

People get lost in the valley, and are grateful for the hospitality of the hotel, where the wines are neat, the food is good, and, as for the company, you can take it or leave it. You may meet a long-lost friend or enemy in the saloon bar, squeezing the foggy dew out of his mustache. You may encounter the unlikeliest people. In the Rother Valley anything can happen—as someone said of New York.

I was not surprised, therefore, to meet an old acquaintance named Albert Dedgeworth, looking askance at a fat Labrador. Her name is Susie, and she is too indolent to avoid the glance of the human eye—she just looks right through you. When I came in, Susie was lying with her ponderous muzzle on the instep of one of Dedgeworth's exquisitely polished black shoes; he, through the influence of the Marquess of Dedgeworth, holds some minor position in the Foreign Office and dresses accordingly: black Homburg, discreetly shabby, fur-lined black over-

coat and all. He always carries a little black attaché case and has the appearance of one who is either going to or coming from a conference at the Kremlin. His face is like an egg upon which a child has sketched a face.

He was pleased to see me. Discreetly sipping a little glass of sherry, he asked, "I say, does this dog bite?"

I replied, "Shove her with your foot and she'll roll over. She is too lazy even to bite bones. Only, I think she has worms. You had better be careful of that."

At this, Dedgeworth got up hastily—one could read, in his transparent face, that he feared eventually to be called over the coals on account of a general worming of the Foreign Office. He stepped over the dog Susie and found a seat in another corner.

"What brings you here, Kersh?" he asked.

"The curry," I said. "But you know me; I'm here and there and everywhere. The point is, what brings you here?"

He said, "Got to have a word with a fellow. . . . Oh, dear!"

He said this with a kind of jump, because at that moment the door opened with a bang and a cheerful man bounded into the saloon bar, showing eighteen teeth, white as sugar, in an all-embracing smile. He was dressed in tweeds, too tight-fitting, and sported a painted tie. On one side of his head he wore one of those beret caps, and somehow it became him. He saw Dedgeworth and extended a powerful hand decorated with three or four of the aluminum rings that French aviators and racing motorists used to exchange as keepsakes, and gave Dedgeworth's reluctant right hand a grip that squeezed from him a kind of ladylike shriek.

He hauled Dedgeworth to his feet, embraced him and kissed him on both cheeks, shouting, in broken English which I shall not attempt phonetically, "Ohol Albair! Aly-pally, long time no see, my dear! Your charming and delightful aunt is indisposed. You should visit her, darling, yes; no, you should. You have your little family differences? Ah, bah! Let all be forgive and forgot, that is the motto of Bubu-le-Costaud! Your lady auntie

bears you no grief, old chicken, and I have something in my pocket to prove it. Eh, my little lamb?"

Albert Dedgeworth, hideously embarrassed, muttered in his Foreign Office French, "Please, my friend, there are strangers present."

But Bubu-le-Costaud, quite unabashed, took me by both hands and, laughing an infectious laugh, cried, "Any friend of my little darling Albair is mine to command until hell pops! I knew a M'sieu Kursz a long time ago, but somehow I do not think he was a relation of yours. He met with an accident. He lost his head, literally. In this life it is necessary to keep your head."

Dedgeworth said, "Shall we get to business?"

The other man said, "Oh, you bet you my life!" A cloud came over his face, which then became curiously still and indefinitely ugly. "It is impossible for me, as a man of honor, to say that I like your manner," said he.

I said, "This is private business—"

"That's right. Leave us alone, Gerald, won't you?" said Dedgeworth.

I stood up, treading on the dog, who did not notice; but Mr. Bubu-le-Costaud said, "No. This gentleman is sympathetic; he is not cold."

Dedgeworth said, "Can't we, at least, go into the dining room?"

We went into the dining room, which was empty. I pretended to want to go away, but Bubu-le-Costaud would not let me. Dedgeworth sat on the edge of a chair, looking, as the saying goes, like Death warmed up.

The other man took out a sealskin wallet with gold corners, and carefully extracted an envelope, which he gave to Dedgeworth, saying, "Normally, my old basket of fish, I would have given this to you discreetly, in some unheard-of place—say, a public lavatory. But you have wounded your dear aunt"—he kissed his hand—"and hurt my feelings, which are sensitive. I am, by nature, retiring, gallant, hypersensitive. I am easier to

bruise than an apricot. You are harsh, cold, my little smog. There was a time when, to employ a vulgarism, you would not have got away with it. There was a time when you and all Scotland Yard would not have dared to look down their nose at me. So here, right in front of your friend, here is your auntie's check for two thousand pounds. It is taking the bread from my feet and the roof from my mouth. Na!"

Dedgeworth, having looked into the envelope, pocketed it and said, "Thanks."

Bubu-le-Costaud lifted him out of his chair, kissed him on both cheeks—winking at me over his shoulder—and said, "I have ordered a magnum of Cordon Rouge. Not for you. For him. I knew a M'sieu Korsh—subsequently he joined the Foreign Legion, but he deserted in 1909, I think. I saw a photograph of his remains after he had been shockingly mutilated by Tuaregs or somebody."

Then he turned to Dedgeworth and said, "This mystifies this sympathetic gentleman, yes? You will tell him this story, my cabbage, or, as the Americans say, else!"

I saw him to the door. He had a beautiful white English car. It was interesting to observe that, before he got in, he looked out of the corners of his eyes up and down the road; then hopped into the driver's seat and roared away into the mist of the valley.

When I went back to the dining room, there was the magnum of Cordon Rouge and Dedgeworth. He said, "Don't have anything to do with that man. It is not merely that he is an incorrigible crook. He is an unmitigated snurge."

Mr. Harrild, the *hôtelier*, in whose huge hands the magnum looked like half a pint, popped the cork; and, after he had gone, Dedgeworth proceeded to tell me the most fantastic love story in the world:

That man, he told me, was all kinds of a rogue. Scraping the thinking part of his silly head, fumbling for terms of abuse not

too undiplomatic, he fished up unheard-of epithets. The man, he said, was a leper, a pipkin, a trolleybob and a snurge.

I asked him why he took money from such a type, let alone allowing the fellow to kiss him in public. And he, in the Foreign Office—fur collar, umbrella and what have you!

Dedgeworth said that it was not the money of that unmitigated snurge that he had accepted; it was family money, and his by right. He would see that loathsome drip starving in the gutter before he accepted a five-pound note from him.

Naturally, I asked him how a Dedgeworth had come to be associated with a fellow he so deeply despised. He said it was all the fault of his Aunt Sara, who—strictly confidentially, between us—was what might be described as a kind of a twillip. An old maid. She looked, he said, like a crow that has fluttered about trying to escape from a paint shop; one was ashamed to be seen with her; only, as luck would have it, Aunt Sara had three quarters of a million pounds to leave, and times were hard.

He applied to this elderly lady the most opprobrious appellations.

I said to him, "Come, now, Dedgeworth; I do not get your line of reasoning. You would not take money from snurges, et cetera, but you have no hesitation in accepting it from all the strange, creepy creatures you mention. I do not get this."

He said that he had a boy going to school and a girl going somewhere or other, an establishment to keep up, appearances to keep up. He vaguely indicated that his sable collar was made scruffy by an expert, at considerable expense. In any case, his aunt's money—he called her "that old trout"—was his by right. It did not go against his conscience to touch her—not physically, for that would be repulsive—for a thousand or two every so often. But he could not possibly meet her; she, therefore, sent that slob as go-between, with something in an envelope.

When he was halfway through the magnum, his story came out, in the strictest confidence. The Foreign Office does not keep my confidences; I'll see them further before I keep theirs!

His Aunt Sara, at Dedgeworth's instigation, had put down the money for a station wagon built onto the engine and chassis of a Rolls-Royce. It was a magnificent machine. The back seats folded away to make a double bed; the boot was constructed to hold luggage for a large family.

It was Dedgeworth's Aunt Sara who was set on this idea; she was a romantic woman, and liked the idea of picnics, especially in her new Rolls-Royce car. It was she who paid for everything. Therefore, who was to prevent her bringing along an oil-burning stove and a frying pan, in case there might be a picnic? Certainly not Dedgeworth; he was his aunt's heir, and kept feeling her pulse all the way to Dieppe.

The idea was to ride southward through France and over the Pyrenees, resting awhile in some quiet Spanish town, and later, getting hold of a boat.

The old lady had no idea of the meaning of money. His Aunt Sara, who believed in him, followed his advice. She even bought new clothes. Dedgeworth felt that he had better placate the old girl, for whom—by the time he came to telling this story—he had developed a dreadful hate.

They went, first of all, to Paris, where Dedgeworth took her to Le Bœuf Sur Le Toit; at which the old lady screamed, but not without pleasure. It is my firm conviction that he was trying to worry his old aunt to death, because then he took her to a night club called Le Belly Danse which, to his disgust, delighted and amused her. She was abashed by the mannequins at the Haute Couture, but giggled at *Tous Mes Chats Sont Nues* at the Moulin de Garrotte. He had hoped, I believe, to shock the old lady to her grave with that spectacle in Montmartre, where you are waited on by undertakers and eat off coffins. It made her laugh until she had hiccups. He had hopes here, but Aunt Sara seemed to be made of iron. She wanted to go somewhere else, saying that she had never had such a lively time in her life.

At last Mr. and Mrs. Dedgeworth got the old lady into bed

and permitted themselves to collapse. Next morning they took the road southward.

"The old beast wore us out," Dedgeworth protested. "She had the vitality of an unmitigated hyena. This at seventy-four, mind you! She couldn't pass a cabaret. Winked at people, really! To cut a long story short, we got to some wretched town called Something-*le*-Something, not far from Perpignan, I believe, and found a hotel with a bathroom. No water. Still, a man felt he was near civilization."

So, Dedgeworth and his wife put his aunt to bed and retired themselves—she had exhausted them. Toward eight o'clock a chambermaid knocked at their door and, wringing her hands, said—if one may trust the French of the Foreign Office—"Alas, woe is me, the old one is stiff and frigid."

"*Qu'est-ce que* you mean?" shouted Dedgeworth.

"*No hablo espagnol*," said the chambermaid. "I go get manager."

They found Dedgeworth's Aunt Sara stiff and stark in her bed. The police and a doctor were summoned. The doctor said that he had not practiced medicine so long without being able to diagnose a cerebral hemorrhage. To which the mayor said, "I thought so all along."

Dedgeworth ran upstairs, presumably to weep, but actually to work out death duties. He came down, ostentatiously wiping his nose, and said that the body of his aunt must be suitably wrapped up in sheets and put in the back of the car. He would take it quickly to Marseilles, the necessary documents being made out, whence his Aunt Sara should be properly boxed up and conveyed to England.

Dedgeworth indicated that he had never had a more relaxed journey. His wife was amiable for the first time in years, and he was occupied with figures, for which he had always a good head, as I have mentioned. He was figuring; which he enjoyed. He drove day and night, because a body does not keep very well in that climate, until he got to Marseilles, when he tried to

explain to an official who spoke nothing but the *patois* that he had a dead aunt in his automobile.

He said something like this, "*Hélas! J'ai une tante. Pourtant, she is morte. Il faut que je get la body to England!*"

The customs official said something like, *Ah, bah!*—and went to find a blond man who said he spoke English.

This man could only say, "Dear lady, I love you very much.

Dedgeworth made some idiotic remark, such as, translated, might mean: "I love the corpse of my aunt and have enveloped her in linen."

The other man said, with emotion, "*Quelle delicatesse!*"

At last Dedgeworth yelled, "*Pour l'amour de goodness, où est the British consul?*"

The official said what may be freely translated as, "Oh, but my faith! Head of the pig! It is nothing but a foreigner trying to talk English! Can you imagine that?"

Then this man brought along another man, who gave Dedgeworth a look which went right through him, and addressed him in fluent English. Now Dedgeworth, though well educated, had a tendency to stammer when upset. He made some ridiculous noises and was led by the scruff of the neck to the police station. It was assumed that he was a Russian.

His wife, whom Dedgeworth had armed with a revolver, ran after him flourishing this weapon and was seized.

Eventually, of course, the affair was straightened out at the local police station, and apologies were offered.

But when Dedgeworth, accompanied by the British consul, asked, "*Où est my car?*"—nobody knew.

"*Le voiture de m'sieu?*" bellowed a gendarme.

Dedgeworth shouted, "*Où est the corpse de ma tante?* No, I mean to say, really!"

Quite simply that elegant Rolls-Royce station wagon, together with all his luggage and his wife's luggage and the dead body of his aunt, had disappeared.

The chief of police said, "It would appear that someone stole it."

"Evidently," said the mayor.

The British consul said, "*Je demande* what the *au fond*—Eh?" He added, "Sorry, old man. Bit bloody, what?"

The chief of police demanded a translation, and the linguist of the party said that there was an old man—*vieillard*—presumably covered with blood. At this, an officer half drew his pistol, while the British consul, throwing up his hands, howled, "This is an international incident!"

You can imagine the state of mind of Dedgeworth, shouting, "*Où est* the corpse *de ma tante?*" His wife was surrounded by sympathetic women who kept hitting her on the back and crossing themselves. One of these women took Dedgeworth by the throat and shook him, screaming in the *patois* insults which it is just as well not to print. So he lost his collar. But he still demanded the corpse of his aunt.

The chief of police said to the mayor, "Come on, my old; a Rolls-Royce, a station wagon full of luggage, with a dead body. What? Believe me, old chicken, it is a piece of cheese. I will undertake to produce the goods, the corpse intact and the criminal in irons, within twenty-four hours."

Why he did not deliver will presently be demonstrated.

The slowest-witted reader must have guessed what had happened. Taking advantage of what Dedgeworth called "the whole kerfuffle," a respectable-looking man wearing a blue suit and a chauffeur's cap had climbed into the driver's seat and driven the station wagon away. It was not until later that a frenzied witness remembered that this man carried a bunch of about eighty-four keys on a ring, and appeared to be in a desperate hurry. The car disappeared in the dust—"like an oiled phantom."

The inspector of police said, "If that is not Costaud, I will hang myself with my bootlaces, name of a name!"

His subordinates hoped that the inspector was wrong, and might keep his word for once. But the inspector was right. The man in the chauffeur's cap was, indeed, Bubu-le-Costaud, one of the most daring car thieves in France. He had been a racing

motorist in his youth, and it was said in the trade that if you put Bubu in a baby carriage, he would manage to get eighty kilometers an hour out of it.

He steered the great car rather than drove her—they were in such perfect accord—at a hundred kilometers an hour on roads over which the most reckless driver would hesitate to ride at fifty. He made fantastic turns, heading for a certain place he knew. This was one of his clearinghouses. It had the appearance of a middle-sized farm, with its usual complement of barns. But when Bubu sounded his horn in a certain way, the doors of the biggest barn slid back and Bubu drove into a large, efficiently equipped auto-repair shop.

The doors slid to behind him, and a man came forward to greet him, saying, "*Allo, sacré* Bubu! What load of old iron have you brought me this time?"

"*Allo, Jojo!* This," said Bubu, with emotion, "is a beauty. I almost feel that if I could only keep her, I would never look at another car."

"Well, she is better than a sardine tin," Jojo admitted. "Crammed with luggage too. You have the luck of the devil." Jojo had opened the door. "Hand luggage fit for a king!"

"And by the way she rides, enough trunks in the boot for a maharajah!" cried Bubu. "But what's in that big bundle in the back seat?"

"Soon find out," said Jojo, pulling aside a blanket and flashing a powerful torch. Then he withdrew with a yelp of terror, and said, "Holy blue, it is an Egyptian mummy!"

Bubu said encouragingly, "If it is in good condition, I can get a good price for it. But I fear it is one of those things the Egyptians sell to tourists—papier-mâché, canvas and sawdust. Give us a light, old rooster. Let's see." He took the torch and looked more closely.

Bubu was a man of iron nerve. "Jojo, take it easy," he said in a small subdued voice. "I'm sorry to have to inform you that it is a corpse. Now be calm."

But Jojo's yells of execration might have been heard all over

the countryside. I shall not attempt to paraphrase. He ended howling, "It only wanted this! I work, I slave! I risk my liberty! I risk my neck for this son of a dog, and he thanks me by bringing a wagonload of corpses!"

"Calm, Jojo, calm. One can always dig a little hole!"

"Oh, you kind of a donkey! If it was only the crate, it would be a routine investigation. But the corpse of some diplomat's wife?"

"How do you know?"

"Because, you ape, the license number is a Corps Diplomatique one." He slammed the door violently, motioning Bubu back into the driver's seat. "Get that load out of here!"

"You might co-operate, Jojo."

"Listen, you," said Jojo in an unpleasantly even voice, producing a heavy automatic pistol, "I might as well have two stiffs on my hands as one. On your way."

With perfect aplomb, Bubu said, "I am not impressed by your ironmongery, Jojo. Put it away. In any case, I could break your arm before your safety catch was down." Jojo looked to reassure himself that his safety catch was not safe, in which split second Bubu-le-Costaud disarmed him, and said, cool as an Englishman, "Fill her up, sweetheart, and check the oil. Also the tires. It is economic. I am disappointed in you, but I have your interests at heart, old pig. If you want me away with this load, which, goodness knows, I never meant to bear, you'd better give me the means of transportation. Say, for example, I broke down a few kilometers from here? . . . Hurry up. Much as I hate loud noises—I have battle fatigue—I am interested in machinery, and have never fired a Luger of nine millimeters. Eh?"

Jojo did as he was told. "Where are you going?" he asked at parting.

"Where the monkey hides his feed," said Bubu, who no longer trusted him; and drove as he had never driven before—across country, through ravines—drove like a cold-blooded maniac to a certain cave in the mountains which he had happened upon

thirty years ago. He had said nothing about this to his coadjutors. He was a prudent man, and knew that there is no more honor among thieves than among law-abiding men. Sad experience had taught him that there comes a time in the life of every man when he is glad of a place to hide—some little place that nobody knows.

Bubu-le-Costaud's hiding place in this locality was a great cave hidden by trees. It was inaccessible to any vehicle but that which was driven by Bubu himself—safe as houses, so long as the police did not pick up the tracks of the heavy car on the dry road. Here, luck held. He had no sooner braked the Rolls-Royce to a standstill in the cave than a little whirlwind came up, such as one gets in those parts, and scattered the dust left and right for miles.

Now, having breathing space, Bubu decided upon a plan of procedure: he would lay the corpse to rest, respectfully, in the coldest and driest corner of the cave, leave the car there and make his way on foot to the little, somnolent town of Zaid-sur-l'Ix. He had not the slightest intention of leaving behind such *et ceteras* as jewel cases.

But first things first. He picked up the body of the old lady. Then something happened that made him "swallow his tongue," as he said afterward.

The corpse of Mr. Dedgeworth's aunt put its arms around his neck.

All he could think of saying was, "What is the meaning of this?"

The corpse said, "Where am I? It's very cold. Where is my chocolate?"

And Bubu replied, "It would have been bad enough with a corpse. But alive! No, I mean to say, this is just a little bit too much!"

The old lady, holding him tightly, whimpered, "I don't know where I am. I want to go home. I'm cold."

Although "Costaud" means "tough guy," Bubu was well known for his soft heart, as well as for his iron nerve. He

wrapped the old lady in everything he could find, and said, in his execrable English, "Dear lady, my old bird, I would light you a fire, but that is out of the question. The pigs would see the smoke."

"Pigs?"

"That is to say, cops."

"There is a picnic hamper in my car, surely, with a stove and everything. . . . But what am I doing here?"

Bubu-le-Costaud, thinking very rapidly, said, "Why, dear lady, as a matter of fact, I fell passionately in love with you. That Englishman with the little round hat and his wife with teeth like a horse, they were not sympathetic to me. I drugged you and carried you away, because you are adorable—"

"To a cave?"

"Naturally. Of course, to a cave. Where else?"

She, remembering the works of Miss E. M. Hull, said, "All my bones ache from the grip of your steel hands! . . . You will find everything in the hamper. Also, open the big black cabin trunk. My clothes are there. But I have no keys."

Bubu assured her that keys were the least of his troubles at the moment—his best friends should have such troubles—if the worst came to the worst, he could open a trunk with a bobby pin. He did as the old lady said, and stepped outside for a while, returning to find her fully dressed and wrapped in a sable coat.

"It's better than a picnic," said Dedgeworth's aunt. "It's like something out of a book!"

Bubu was pondering. A sensible man—Jojo, for example—would have killed the old lady with a spanner, and made his lucky, as the saying goes. But Bubu didn't have the heart to do this. Instead, having made something hot to eat and drink on the stove, he kept her warm, fell into conversation, and indicated to her that he was a man of somewhat irregular life. What would she? His parents would not allow him to marry for love; he left home and fell among evil companions, joined the For-

eign Legion—Ouled-Nail, and all that. Came back, joined the *Résistance*.

She said, "All the nice Frenchmen I ever met were in the *Résistance*. I'm so glad you were, Bubu."

He replied, frankly, "Darling lady, in Paris there are five million people. To my certain knowledge, four million, nine hundred ninety-nine thousand, nine hundred ninety-nine were in the *Résistance*. The same applies to Lyons, Marseilles, Toulouse, et cetera. It seems to me, if you want my candid opinion, that Germany never occupied France; France occupied Germany. Eh, my little coconut? . . . Although in Algiers, out of a population of three hundred fifteen thousand, two hundred ten, I did meet three collaborators in a coffee shop. . . . Yes, my crooning pigeon, I was in North Africa, because here, at the time, I did not like the atmosphere."

"Poor Bubu. Did the Nazis persecute you?"

"Bitterly," said Bubu. He had been double-crossed in the matter of a bullet-proof Mercedes-Benz; the *Feldwebel* had withheld the commission. "But I was in the street fighting in 1944," he said, "and I flatter myself I did my share of damage."

"Tell me about it."

"Oh, no, little chicken, it is not for your ears!" cried Bubu. "They are exactly like little cockleshells. My little banana, so long as you are O.K., I am happy, For myself, I am in some trouble. First of all, I have abducted you. In order to do this satisfactorily, it has been necessary for me to steal a car."

"But it is my car, Bubu! You didn't steal it!"

"That helps," said Bubu, tightening his belt, which had somehow become loose. "Even so, let them send me to prison. I don't care. I have compromised you. Yet, if my intentions were not honorable, I will give you my written permission publicly to spit in my face, kick me in the pancreas and call me a camel!"

Dedgeworth's Aunt Sara said that she would not dream of doing these things in any circumstances.

"Then marry with me!" cried Bubu. "We will drive to Zaid-

sur-l'Ix, and the *maire* shall make us one. What say, old hen?"

She said yes, with a wicked twinkle—thinking presumably of her nephew and his long-toothed wife. Rummaging in the trunks, Bubu found a formal suit which was too large for him, and a new bowler hat which was too small for him. He found also a stiff collar, an Old Harrovian tie and a pair of patent-leather shoes. It was the old lady who persuaded him not to wear full evening dress, in spite of his protest that a man does not get married every afternoon.

He coaxed the mighty Rolls-Royce out of the cave and onto the road, and up the mountain to Zaid-sur-l'Ix. Even the inspector of police of this slumbering town had been alerted; at all costs, there was to be returned to Marseilles an English diplomat's Rolls-Royce containing the corpse of the diplomat's aunt; incidentally, dead or alive, one Robert LaBlanche, alias Bubu-le-Costaud.

A gendarme who was removing wax from his ears with a bayonet did what they call a "double-take"—first he saluted; then he leaped into the air and blew a whistle. But the car stopped outside the *mairie*, and by the time the police force got into action, the *maire* had his sash on. In half an hour Dedgeworth's aunt was Mrs. Bubu-le-Costaud, and proud of it.

"I could not resist you, because you are so beautiful," said Bubu, with his eyes on the bonnet of the Rolls-Royce.

So they drove happily back to Marseilles. Bubu regarded this as another of his lucky escapes, but when, on the way, the old lady said that she had heard that under French law a woman's property is her husband's, and told Bubu that she had a fortune of seven hundred and fifty thousand pounds, for the first and last time in his life he stalled the engine.

Of the adventure, as such, there is little more to say; it was all over the front page of the Daily Express, to the exclusion of Russia.

So Bubu-le-Costaud lives, now, the life of a country gentleman, near Northiam in Sussex.

Dedgeworth told me all this with some bitterness. He said, "I mean to say, a bounder ought to be at least mitigated, but this one is simply un! Of course, there was bad blood between my aunt and me. Refused to speak to us, matter of fact, for putting her body into the car like that. Death certificate and all—how would she have liked it if I'd have buried her on the spot? I put it to her, and she saw it in that light, of course. She was going to cut off my allowance. But do you know, it was that out-and-out snurge that pleaded for me?"

"And every so often, what with the state of things, when we need a few pennies, it is that miserable fellow who acts as go-between. Damn it, he kisses me! But my aunt and I are not on speaking terms. Oh, buttercups, a man has his pride! Must draw the line somewhere, what? I will do anything within reason for my wife and children, but I will not in public call him 'Uncle Bubu'!"

THE LAST HUSKY

By FARLEY MOWAT

THE PEOPLE built the little igloo and departed into the wastelands. They went from the place singing the laments for the dying, and they left nothing behind them except the old man. They even took Arnuk, the dog, for that was the old man's wish, and Arnuk was the most precious gift that an old man could make to his son and to his people.

It had been a bitter season, the long, hungry weeks before the spring, and in the camp of the people there had been the cries of children who were too young to know that starvation must be faced in silence. There had been death in the camp; not of men, but of those who were almost as important to the continuance of human life. For the dogs had died, one by one, and as each was stilled so did man's hopes for the future shrink. For in the stark plains country of the Barren Lands the lives of men and dogs are one in their need for each other.

Yet though it had been a bitter time, there had been no word spoken against the folly of feeding one old and useless human body. Maktuk, the son, had shared his own meager rations equally between his aged father and his starving child, who also bore the name that linked the three together. No word was said, but one dark day in early May the old man raised himself slowly

from the sleeping ledge and gazed for a little while at his grandchild, and out of the depths of a great love and greater courage, old Maktuk spoke these words.

"I have it in my heart," he said, "that the deer await you at the Western Lakes. Go when morning comes, and I will stay. And you shall take Arnuk with you, so that in the years ahead you will remember me and leave the spirit gifts upon my grave."

There had been no discussion, for even an old man has his rights, and this is his final one. In the morning the people were gone, and behind young Maktuk's sled the dog, Arnuk, tugged convulsively at her tether and turned her head backward to a small white igloo, rising shadowless against the endless snows.

Arnuk had been born in the preceding spring, in the lean times that always grip the land before the deer return. She was the seventh pup of the litter, and there was no food for her. And if an old man had not taken it upon himself to feed and care for her, she would have died before her life began. Yet she saw summer come and knew the pleasures of long days spent romping with the other young dogs by the side of the great river where the summer camp was pitched. When she grew tired, she would come to the skin tent and push against the old man's knees until he opened his aged eyes and smiled at her.

And so she grew through the good summer months, and the people in the camp gazed at her almost with awe, for she became beautiful and of a size and strength surpassing that of any other dog. Maktuk, the elder, gave her the name she bore: Arnuk—The Woman—for she was wife and mother to him in the last winter of his years.

Because there can be no death while there is birth, old Maktuk insisted that his dog be mated in the April days, when the moon stands still and the white wolves howl their passion to the flickering northern lights. So it was arranged, for Arnuk bore within her the promise of a strength that would be the people's strength in years to come. And when Maktuk, the elder, felt the throb of new life in the womb of The Woman, he was content.

The spring hunger had already begun before Arnuk was

mated, and the famine grew with the passing days. The older dogs died first, yet near the end even Arnuk's litter mates lay silent in the snows. But Arnuk's strength was great, and when there was some scrap of bone or skin that the people could spare, she received it, for in her womb lay the hopes of the future.

This was the way of things when the people turned from the lonely igloo and, dragging the sleds with their own failing muscles, set their faces to the west.

The ties that bind man and his dog can be of many strengths, but the ties which bound Arnuk to old Maktuk were beyond human power to break. Arnuk went with the people, but resisting fiercely. And on the third day of the journey she gnawed through the rawhide tether, and before dawn she had vanished into the swirling ground drift. In the morning, Maktuk, the son, held the frayed tether in his hand and his face was filled with the sorrow of foreboding. Yet when he spoke to his family, it was with these words:

"What must be, surely cannot be denied. The Woman has gone to my father, and she will be with him when the Snow Walker comes. But my father's spirit will know of our need, and perhaps the day will dawn when he will return The Woman to us, for if she does not come, the years ahead are dark."

As for Arnuk, she reached the little igloo before daybreak, and when the old man opened his eyes to see if it was the Snow Walker at last, he saw the dog instead. And he smiled and laid his bony hand upon her head, and once more he slept.

The Snow Walker was late in coming, but on the seventh day he came, unseen, and when he passed from the place the bond was broken. Yet it was not broken, for Arnuk lingered with her dead three days, and then it was the wind, perhaps, that whispered the unspoken order: "Go to the people; go."

When she emerged from the igloo she found her world had been obliterated beneath a heavy blizzard. For a while she stood in the pale sun, her golden coat gleaming against the purple shadows; then she turned her face with its broad ruff and

wide-spaced amber eyes toward the west, for that way lay her path. And within her, the voices of the unborn generations echoed the voice of the wind, but with a greater urgency. "Go to the tents of men," they told her. "Go."

She did not halt even when darkness swept the bleak plains into obscurity. At midnight she came to the place where she had chewed her way free of young Maktuk's sled. She knew it was the place only by an inner sense, for the snow had leveled all signs and had drifted in all trails. She circled among the hard drifts, whining miserably, for terrible doubts had begun to seize upon her. She climbed a rock ridge to test the night air for some sign that men were near. Scents came to her. The acrid odor of an arctic fox that had fled into invisibility at her approach. But there was no scent of man.

Her whines rose to a crescendo, a wild pleading in the darkness, but there was no answer except the rising moan of the wind. And at length, worn into a stupor by the weight of her hunger and by her loneliness, she curled up in the shelter of a drift and lost herself in dreams.

So the dog slept in the heart of the unfathomable wilderness. But as she dozed uneasily, a profound change was taking place in the secret places of her body. A strange alchemy was at work. She lay with her nose outstretched on her broad forepaws and her muscles twitched with erratic impulses. Saliva flowed to her mouth, and in it was the taste of blood. In her mind's eye she laid her stride to that of the swift deer, and her teeth met in the living flesh, and she knew the savage ecstasy of the last quiver in a dying prey.

From somewhere out of time, the ageless instincts that lie in all living cells were being reborn so that the dog, and the new life within her, would not perish. And when Arnuk raised her head to the dawn light, the thing was done, the change complete.

The dawn was clear, and Arnuk, her perceptions keenly sharpened by the chemistry of change, tested the wind. When she found the warm smell of living flesh, she rose to seek it out.

Not far distant, a snowy owl, dead white and shadowless in the predawn, had earlier swept across the plains with great eyes staring. The owl had seen and fallen so swiftly on a hare that the beast had known nothing until the inch-long talons clutched his life and took it from him. It was a good kill, and the owl felt pleasure as it perched above the corpse. The great bird savored the weight of its own hunger, and while it sat complacent, crouched above the hare, it did not see the flow of motion on a nearby drift.

Arnuk was a weasel creeping up upon a mouse; a snake slithering upon a sparrow. Skills she had never known, skills that had come to her in all completeness from forgotten half beasts lost in the dimmest aeons, were hers now. Her belly dragged on the hard snows and she inched forward. When she was a dozen feet away, the owl raised its head and the yellow eyes of the bird stared with expressionless intensity full into Arnuk's face. Arnuk was the stillness of death, yet every muscle vibrated in the grip of a passion such as she had never known before. And when the owl turned back to its prey, Arnuk leaped. The owl saw the beginning of the leap and threw itself backward into its own element with a smooth thrust of mighty wings. But those wings were a fraction slow and the hurtling form of the dog, leaping six feet into the air, struck flesh beneath the feathers. It was a brief battle. Three times the talons of the bird drew blood, and then they stiffened and relaxed in death.

Arnuk slept afterward while white feathers blew into the bleak distance, and tufts of white fur moved like furtive living things in the grip of the wind. And when she woke again, the agony of her hunger was at an end and the savage drive of her new instincts was momentarily dulled. Once more she was man's beast, and lost.

She woke and, without a glance at the red snow beside her, set out again into the west, unconscious, yet directly driven.

The people whom she sought were wanderers on the face of a plain so vast that it seemed limitless. The dog could not conceive of the odds against her finding them, but in her memory

was the image of the summer camp by the wide river where she had spent her youth, and with an unerring perseverance she set her course for that far-distant place.

The days passed, and after each the sun stood a little higher in the sky. Space lengthened under the dog's feet until the explosion of spring disturbed the world. The snows grew soft and the Barrens rivers, freed from their chains, thundered angrily across the plains. In a white and glaring sky, flights of ravens hung like eddies of burned leaves, and on the opening ponds geese mingled with the flocks of raucous gulls.

The awakening of life was in the deep moss where the lemmings tunneled, and it was on the stony ridges where cock ptarmigan swaggered before their mates. It was in all living things and in all places, and it was within the womb of the dog, Arnuk. Her journey had been long, and her broad paws were crusted with the dried blood of a hundred stone cuts. Her magnificent coat was matted now, and lusterless under the spring sun. Nevertheless, she drew upon unknown strengths and upon her own indomitable will, and she went forward into the western plains.

Gaunt, hot-eyed and terribly exhausted, she brought her quest to an end on a day in early June. Breasting a long ridge, she saw before her the brilliant light of sun on roaring water, and she recognized the river. She had come home.

Whining with excitement, she ran clumsily down the slope, for her body had grown awkward in these last days. And soon she was among the rings of weathered boulders where, in the summer that was past, men's tents had stood.

The tents were gone. There was no living man to welcome the return of the lost one. Only on the nearby ridges the motionless piles of rocks that the Eskimos call *Inukok*, Men of Stone, were there to see the coming of Arnuk. They and the hidden piles of bones under rock cairns near the river, the old graves of forgotten people. Arnuk understood that the place was empty of living men, yet for an hour she refused to believe it. Pathetically she ran from old tent ring to old meat cache, sniffing each with a

despairing hope, and finding nothing to give her heart; and when realization became inescapable, the dog curled herself in a hollow beside the place where old Maktuk had once held her at his knees, and she gave herself up to her great weariness and to her bitter disappointment.

Yet the old camp was not quite so empty as it looked. While Arnuk made her fruitless search she had been too preoccupied to know that she was being watched. Had she glanced up the riverbank she might have seen a lithe shape that followed her every move with eyes that held in them a hunger not born of the belly. She would have seen and recognized a wolf, and her hackles would have risen and her teeth been bared. For the dogs of man and the dogs of the wilderness walk apart, theirs being the ancient hatred of brothers who have denied their common blood.

This wolf was young. Born the preceding season, he had stayed with his family until, in the early spring of this year, the urge to wander had come over him and he had forsaken his ancestral territory. Many adventures had befallen him, and most had been bitter ones, for he had learned, at the cost of torn flanks and bleeding shoulders, that each wolf family guards its own land with savage jealousy and there is no room for a stranger. His offers of friendship had been met with bared teeth in the lands of three wolf clans before, at last, he came to the river and found a place where no wolves were.

It was a good place. Not far from the empty Eskimo camp the river flared angrily over a shallow stretch of rounded boulders to lose itself in the beginning of an immense lake, and at the shallow place the caribou had made a ford in their spring and midsummer migrations. They crossed the river here in untold thousands, and not all escaped the river's anger. The drowned bodies of dead deer lay among the rocks at the river mouth, and so there was ample food for a great population of arctic foxes, ravens and white gulls. But the wolves of the country did not visit the place, for it belonged to man, and that

which man claims to himself is forbidden to the great wild dogs.

Knowing nothing of this prohibition, the young male wolf, the outcast, had taken up his home by the river, and here he nursed his loneliness. Perhaps even more than dogs, wolves are social animals. Companionship in the hunt and in the games that are played after a hunt are vital to the happiness of the big white beasts. Isolation from their own kind is purgatory for them, and they can know a loneliness that eats away the heart.

It had been so with the young wolf, and when he saw and smelled the dog, Arnuk, he was filled with conflicting emotions. He had seen no dog before, yet he sensed that the golden-coated beast below him was not quite of his blood. The smell was strange, and yet it was familiar. The shape and color were strange, and yet they roused in him a warmth of memory and desire.

He had been rebuffed so many times before that he was cautious now, and when Arnuk woke from her sleep of exhaustion, she did not at first see the stranger, but her nostrils told her at once of the nearness of deer meat. Her hunger was savage and overpowering. Without caution, she leaped to her feet and flung herself upon a ragged haunch of caribou that had been dragged to within a few yards of her. Only when she had satisfied her first desperate hunger did she glance up and meet the still gaze of the young wolf.

The wolf sat motionless a hundred feet from the dog, nor did he so much as twitch an ear as Arnuk's hackles lifted and the threat took form deep in her throat. He remained sitting, yet tense to spring away, and after a long minute, Arnuk again dropped her head to the meat, satisfied that the wolf meant her no harm. This was the way of their first meeting. And this is what came of it.

With the mockery of this second deserted camp before her, Arnuk gave up her search for men. She could no longer fight against the insistent demands of her heavy body, and there was no more time for searching. Now once again, in her hour of de-

spair, the hidden force within her took command. Before that first day was out, her mood had changed magically from deep dejection to a businesslike alertness.

Ignoring the young wolf, which still kept its distance, Arnuk made a quick tour of the familiar ground beside the river. She carefully examined the carcasses of five drowned deer, and from each of these she chased the screaming gulls and guttural ravens, for this meat was hers now by right of greater strength. Then, satisfied with the abundant food supply, Arnuk left the river and trotted briskly inland half a mile to where a rock outcrop had opened its flanks to form a shallow cave. Here, as a pup, Arnuk had played with the other dogs of the camp. Now, as a full-grown female, she examined the cave with more serious intent. The place was dry and protected from the winds. There was only one thing wrong, and that was the smell. The rock cleft was pervaded with a potent and unpleasant stench that caused Arnuk to draw back her lips in anger and distaste—for no animal upon the face of the arctic plains has any love for the squat, ugly and murderous wolverine. And a wolverine had clearly used the cave during the winter months.

Arnuk's nose told her that the wolverine had been gone for several weeks, and there was little likelihood that he would return until the winter winds forced him to seek shelter. Arnuk scratched earth and sand over the unclean floor; then set about dragging moss into the deepest recess. And here at last she hid herself and made surrender to her hour.

Arnuk's pups were born on the third day she spent in the cave, on a morning when the cries of the white geese were loud in the spring air. It was the time of birth, and the five squirming things that lay warm against the dog's fur were not alone in their first day of life. On the sand ridges beyond the river a female ground squirrel suckled the naked motes of flesh that were hers, and in a den by a ridge a mile distant an arctic fox thrust his alert face above the ground while the feeble whimpers of the pups his mate was nursing warned him of the tasks ahead. All living

things in the land by the river moved to the rhythm of the demands of life newborn or soon to be born. All things moved to this rhythm except the outcast wolf.

For the three days that Arnuk remained hidden, the young wolf knew a torment that gave him no peace. Restless, yearning for things he had never known, he haunted the vicinity of the cave. He did not dare go too close, but each day he dragged a piece of deer meat within a few yards of the cave mouth and then drew back to wait with pathetic patience for his gift to be accepted.

On the third day, as he lay near the cave, snapping at the flies which hung about his head, his keen ears felt the faintest tremors of a new sound. He was on his feet instantly, head outthrust and his body trembling with attention. It came again, so faint that it was felt rather than heard—a tiny whimper that called to him across the ages and across all barriers. And in that instant his great unease was at an end. He shook himself sharply and, with one quick, proprietary glance at the cave mouth, trotted out across the plain—no longer a solitary outcast, but a male beginning the evening hunt that would feed his mate and pups. So, simply and out of his deep need, the young wolf filled the void that had surrounded him through the torturing weeks of spring.

Arnuk did not easily accept the wolf in the role he had chosen to play. For several days she kept him at bay with bared teeth, although she ate the food offerings he left at the cave mouth. But before a week was out she had come to expect the fresh meat—the tender ground squirrels, the arctic hares and plump ptarmigan. And from this it was not really a long step to complete acceptance of the wolf.

Arnuk sealed the compact with him in the second week after the pups were born. Coming to the den mouth one morning, she found the carcass of a freshly killed hare lying ready for her, and only a few feet away, the sleeping form of the young wolf.

It had been a long, hard hunt that night, and the wolf had

covered most of the hundred square miles of territory that he had staked out for his adopted family, and so, exhausted by his efforts, he had not bothered to retire the usual discreet distance from the den.

For a long minute Arnuk stared at the sleeping beast, and then, with the motion of one who stalks an enemy, she moved toward the wolf. But there was no real menace in her action, and when she reached the wolf's side her great plumed tail went up into its husky curl and her lips spread as if in laughter.

The wolf woke, raised his head, saw her standing over him, and knew that here at last was the end to loneliness. The morning light blazed over the den ridge as the two great beasts stood shoulder to shoulder, gazing out over the awakening plains.

In the days that followed, life was good by the banks of the river. For Arnuk there were no fears and no empty places in her heart. And for the wolf there was the swelling pride with which he lay in the sun outside the den while the pups tussled with his fur and chewed at his patient feet.

So time passed until the pups were in their seventh week. Midsummer was in the Barrens, and the herds of deer were drifting southward once again in the July migration that precedes the final autumn trek to timberline. The crossing place was once more thronged with caribou, and the young calves grunted beside their ragged mothers, while the old bucks, their velvet-covered antlers reaching to the skies, moved aloofly in the van.

And then one evening a desire for the long chase came over Arnuk, and in the secret ways that men know nothing of, she made her desire apparent to the wolf. When the late summer dusk fell, Arnuk went out alone into the darkening plains, secure in the knowledge that the wolf would remain to guard the pups until her return, though she be gone a year.

She did not intend a long absence—only a few hours at the most—but near the outskirts of the territory she came on a band of young buck deer. They were fine beasts, and fat, which at this

time of the year was a mouth-watering oddity. Tired of too much lean meat, Arnuk knew a sudden surge of appetite, and she circled the resting herd, filled with an ardent hunger.

A change of the uncertain breeze betrayed her, and the startled deer sprang to their feet and fled. Arnuk was hungry, and the night was a hunter's night. She took up the long chase.

So the hours drove the brief darkness from the land, and when the hard early winds of dawn rose in the north the young wolf roused himself from his vigil at the cave mouth. A sense of dim foreboding made him turn to the den and thrust his head and shoulders into the entrance. All was well, and the pups were rolled together in a compact ball, jerking their stubby legs in sleep. Yet the feeling of uneasiness persisted in the wolf's mind, and he turned toward the river, where the gray light picked out the roll of distant ridges.

Perhaps he was worried by the long absence of the dog, perhaps he had been warned by senses that remain unknown to us. His uneasiness grew, and at last he trotted away from the den, sniffing at the cold trail of Arnuk, hoping to see her golden form approaching from inland.

He had gone no more than half a mile when the vague sense of something evil took concrete form. A vagrant eddy brought the north breeze to his nostrils and instantly he knew what had disturbed him when he woke. He turned back toward the cave with startling speed.

As he breasted the slope beside the den, the stink of wolverine rose like a foul miasma in his nostrils, and the young wolf was transformed in the instant into a savage thing, distract with the most elemental rage. He came down the slope in half a dozen gigantic leaps, his ears flat to his skull and his great throat rumbling with incoherent hate.

Several hours earlier, the wolverine had winded the young pups in his old winter lair. He had not had any intention of revisiting the foul winter den as he made his way slowly upriver, but the smell of the pups had tempted him. Perhaps he would

have ignored even that temptation, for though he feared no living thing he had no particular desire to meet the fury of a female wolf defending her young. But the night had been empty for him, and his cavernous belly rumbled with hunger. His temper, always vile, was edged by hunger, and so, in the gray dawn light, he turned from the river and circled cautiously upwind until he found a rock outthrust that gave him cover, and from which he could observe the den. Here he waited with a terrible patience until he saw the young wolf trot from the den mouth toward the inland plains.

Still cautiously, the wolverine left his cover and moved in upon the den, pausing for long moments to reassure himself that the pups were really undefended. His squat, massive body hugged the rough ground as he drew closer, and now fully certain of success, he could already taste the pleasure of the killing and the salt warmth of blood.

There was blood enough for him to taste that dawn. But it was not the blood of Arnuk's pups.

The young wolf's savage rush was so swift that the wolverine had only sufficient time to slew about and take the weight of the attack upon his side. It was enough to save him, for the wolf's white teeth sank deep through the tough skin, but missed their promised hold upon the throat, and met instead in the sinews of the killer's shoulder. On any other beast it would have been a good hold, leading to victory, but on the wolverine it was not good enough. The wolverine knows neither fear nor pain, and its squat body is possessed of a strength equal to any beast three times its size. A weasel by blood, with all the weasel's maniac ferocity, the wolverine has the body of a bear, and such is its vitality that life remains in it until that body has been literally torn apart.

So it was with the old beast at the cave mouth. He did not feel his injury, but instead was aflame with an insane anger. He swung his fifty pounds of bone and gristle into a savage counter-thrust.

Had the wolf been older and more experienced, he might

have sidestepped that lunge, but he was young, and blinded by the allegiance that he had so freely given to the pups that he had never sired. He held his grip and did not slacken it as the wolverine's teeth raked his unprotected flank.

They fought in silence from that moment. The sun, red on the eastern rim, was pallid beside the glare of blood upon the rocks. The pups, drawn to the cave mouth by the first onslaught, watched the terrible duel for an instant, and then, appalled by the fury of the struggle, slunk into the dark earth and lay in trembling fear.

It was the gulls that warned Arnuk. From afar off, as she came wearily homeward in the warmth of the morning, she saw them circling and heard their strident screams. They eddied above the rocks where the den lay, and weary as she was, a great anxiety gave her new strength and she came on at full pace. And so she found the murderer, torn to bloody fragments before the murder was begun. And so she found the wolf, his throat ripped raggedly across and his still body stiffening beneath the rising sun.

The bodies still lay near the cave when, a week later, the voices of men echoed once more along the shores of the river. And they still lay by the cave a little later on, when the young man called Maktuk bent down to the dark opening and very gently thrust his hand under the timid pups, while Arnuk, half wild with old emotions, stood trembling by his side. Maktuk was a man of the plains, and he could read much that cannot ever be written, so that he knew all there was to know of what had taken place beneath those shattered rocks.

It was because he knew, that, on an evening in late summer, he took his son to the bank of the river and placed the boy's hand on the head of the golden dog and spoke these words:

"Maktuk, my son. In a little time you shall be a man and a hunter, and all the wide plains will know your name and skill. In those days you will have certain friends to help you in the hunt, and of these the greatest you shall always call Arnuk, and

then my father will know that we have received his gift and he will be at ease. And in those times to come, all beasts shall fall to your spear and bow, save one alone. For never while you live shall your hand be raised against the white one, against Amarok, the wolf—and so shall the people pay their debt to him."

COMMISSAR IN CONNECTICUT

By LEON WARE

His four years' duty in the Navy finally behind him, Webb Curtis was starting out with an elderly car, a B.S. in journalism and fifteen hundred dollars. The world, obviously, was a pushover and ripe for plucking.

He swung into a wide curve on the graveled road he had taken by impulse, and a white sign caught his attention:

PLUM HILL
POP. 1700

Seventeen hundred people. Not for him. Plum Hill might be a nice-sized town to retire to, but he was already four years late getting his career going. What he needed was a city—say something about the size of New York. Webb smiled a little and the smile completed the false illusion begun by his round, dark-rimmed glasses, that here was a quiet, lanky young man, probably given to dull books and lonely walks beside the sea. Somehow it rarely occurred to people that the long, lean jaw and wide, strong mouth might be a better indication of his character.

As the curving road straightened out, a black sedan loomed up ahead, white dust curling angrily behind it. Webb eased toward the outside of the curve, but the other car came lunging at

him and in the last moment he jerked his wheels into the ditch. The sedan hurtled on by, a shower of gravel washing over Webb's car, and he got a fleeting glimpse of a sneering, flat-faced, dark-browed driver. While Webb sat listening to the fading roar of the sedan and the expiring gasp from his punctured right front tire, he remembered that the other car's license plate had somehow seemed different. Then he clamped his long jaw down hard and got out to inspect the damage.

The right fender, jammed into the embankment, was crushed in against the tire. The axle was probably bent too. He took his suitcase from the tilted car and set out down the road. Plum Hill was just ahead, and among the inhabitants there had to be at least one mechanic. And maybe, too, there was someone who could tell him who the driver of the black sedan was. At the moment, this knowledge was of paramount importance.

Bill Oatway's garage at the edge of the pleasant little town was not busy. Webb described what had happened.

"I'll fix it," the gaunt mechanic said.

"Got a newspaper here?" Webb asked.

Oatway pointed down the tree-lined street. "Courier office beyond the bridge there."

"I'll look in on the car later," Webb said. He shoved his bag into the garage office and ambled down the road.

Plum Hill had an idyllic setting high on a slope of the long neck of land. It overlooked clumps of trees and lush green meadows beyond which glinted the sparkling Block Island Sound. The white-clapboard houses were set comfortably apart, well shaded and neatly gardened, yet there was a gentle air of stagnation about the town. For one thing, there were more store buildings than were necessary to support the community. Apparently Plum Hill had once serviced a resort district which had diminished somewhat in recent years.

Webb crossed the narrow bridge over the creek and paused before the dusty windows of the Plum Hill Courier. He smiled —this was a nostalgic touch of home. His father still edited the

Weekly Hunter, of Huntersville, Nebraska, and Webb had grown up around just such a plant as this. He pushed open the door and took a deep breath of the aroma that rushed out to greet him—paper, dust, printer's ink, hot lead and oil. He filled his lungs happily and stepped inside.

The desks and counters were cluttered with ledgers and old newspapers, and from the pressroom beyond came the steady clatter of a typesetting machine. Webb stuck his head through the opened doorway. The ancient machine was angled before a tall, dirty window, and the operator was a slender girl in sweater and slacks, a bright red ribbon tied around her brown hair. Her fingers moved rhythmically for a moment, and then the clatter ceased as she turned her head.

"Hi."

"Where is everybody?" Webb asked.

She studied him, her gray eyes sober.

"I have a pressman two days a week. Otherwise everybody is here and working." She punched a few keys and paused again. "What can I do for you?"

"Who drives a big black sedan with odd license plates? Flat-faced, beetle-browed guy with a reckless disposition?"

She gazed at him with new interest. "Why?"

"Because I'm going to flatten his face a little more when I catch up with him."

She smiled cynically. "Ah-ah! Mustn't touch." She rippled off a couple of lines of type, and Webb picked one up, tossed it expertly from hand to hand while he read it, then dropped it back in the slide.

"Your local nabob, I take it?"

"The man you refer to," she said, punching away at her keys, "is undoubtedly Sergei Michanoff, Moscow's gift to the U.N., America, and to Plum Hill in particular."

"So?"

"Exactly. As near as we can determine, he is the local headman for the Russians who have bought and barricaded the old

Stuyvesant van Retlow estate, down on the point. Sergei likes to tread on toes, especially capitalistic toes. He has a license to do so—you must have seen it on the car."

"You mean diplomatic immunity."

"Oh, boy, and are they immune!" she said. "They go through here at forty or fifty miles an hour. They don't pay taxes; they hardly pay their grocery bills, and if we lift a hand, Washington is down here, hushing it up. Why—" She broke off and set her lips firmly for a moment. "Don't get me started," she said, and went back to her keys.

Webb took off his glasses, polished them and put them back on. "Spell you," he said amiably.

She glanced up, surprised; then slid off the cut-down kitchen chair and he took her place. It had been a long time. He limbered up his fingers on the keys, took the line when it dropped down, tossed it to her, then started on the longhand copy.

"Webb Curtis, Huntersville, Neb." She read aloud. "Glad to meet you, Webb. I'm Diane Gage." She dropped the line into the lead pot.

"I've just spent four years in the Navy because of the Russians," Webb said. He scowled at the copy. "You spell Baarsch with two *a*'s?"

"That's right."

"And now, the second day I'm out of the service, they're on my neck again." He told her briefly what had happened.

"You can get away from them," she said tersely. "We're saddled with them here. Of course, most of the big estates on the point are closed up now, but I think they're driving away some of the summer people too. Forty-five people live there at the van Retlow place. Why in the world they need forty-five—" She broke off and held out her hand. "Listen."

There was a roar, a blasting horn, and the black car thundered over the bridge and passed the shop, dragging dust and loose papers after it in a tumbling cloud. Webb had scrambled into the outer office. He turned now and the line of his jaw was etched with a ridge of muscle.

"That's it," he growled.

"Sergei, all right," she said cheerfully. "A dozen times a day he or one of the other drivers is on the road. I don't know what they do or where they go so often. He hasn't killed anyone yet, so we don't know just how far his immunity goes, but everybody's pretty darned mad, believe me."

"Why not do something about it?"

"What? I told you Washington wet-nurses them."

"You've got the best weapon in the world," Webb said, nodding toward the pressroom.

Diane's face sobered. She carefully brushed some dust from one of the ledgers. "I know," she said, "but—well, we're about done here. This was grandpa's, to begin with, and dad took it over, twelve years ago. He died last year; mother the year before. Grandpa helps me what he can, but he's eighty-one now and— Well, we're nearly on the rocks. Everybody knows it. I owe four hundred and thirty dollars for paper right now, and I don't see how we can print more than two or three weeks longer. Then"—she waved her hand futilely—"no more Courier. Fifty-nine years. I'd like to have it last sixty, but you can't have everything."

"Did it make money?"

"Grandpa did very well with it. It tapered off, but the war and newsprint price punctured it for dad. I hate to see it go." She smiled shyly at him. "I had great ideas once. Messages, that sort of thing—they kind of got lost in the daily struggle."

She turned back into the pressroom and slid onto the chair. Webb leaned against the doorway and watched while she wrote out the balance of the copy and shut down the machine.

Diane looked up at him. "I was like all the other people in little papers," she said. "I was going to be another William Allen White."

"My dad's been climbing that ladder for twenty-five years," Webb told her. "It's a long way to the top, without a gimmick. How many people around here?"

"Five or six thousand on the whole neck of land. A lot of little

farms and summer places. In summer we have maybe twenty-five thousand people." She smiled faintly. "Oh, it could be done all right. I—I just don't have what it takes, I guess."

Webb turned at the sound of brakes to see his car stop before the shop. He went out to meet the mechanic.

"Straightened out the fender a little, mister, and put a boot in the tire," the garageman said. "I thought maybe you'd be in a hurry, so I did kind of a quick job. Axle was O.K."

"Thanks," Webb said. "How much?"

"About three-fifty?"

"Reasonable enough." Webb paid him. He turned to go back into the Courier office, and then paused, lifting his head at the humming sound coming down the road again.

Hardly thinking, he jumped into his car and backed it up a bit so it almost blocked the approach to the narrow bridge. Then he got out and stood at the curb as the black sedan whipped down the village street once more and skidded to a sliding halt. The driver leaned on his horn, scowling blackly. People came out of shops, and Webb ambled up to the sedan.

"Move the car," the Russian ordered. There was bleak contempt in his black eyes.

Webb leaned both hands on the window sill of the car. "Why?"

The Russian stared at him in some surprise. "Diplomatic car. Union of Soviet Socialist Republics' mission to the United Nations."

"So what?"

"You interfere with official business!"

"Look, Buster," Webb said softly; "you ran me off the road an hour ago. Who's going to pay for the damage?"

Sergei Michanoff's thick lips curled. "Send the bill to Washington. Now, move the car or I hit it."

Webb's left hand shot in, grabbed the Russian's necktie and pulled the startled face half out of the window. "You hit that car and I'll tromp on your stomach!" He jerked the tie tighter and Sergei's face got red, both from lack of oxygen and from fury.

"Your diplomatic immunity extends only so far, Buster. It doesn't include Webb Curtis. Now, have you got that in your thick skull?"

He let go of the tie, and the man jerked back in the seat. His face blazed with anger, but showed some perplexity too.

"Any time you see that car," Webb warned, "slow down. Now, get on about your business, but be sure it's legal."

He turned his back, walked to his car and drove it slowly from the approach to the bridge. The black sedan lunged ahead with an angry whine. Webb got out of his car and went back into the Courier office through a silent, but obviously approving cluster of local citizens. Diane met him at the door.

"How much do you want for a half interest in this paper?" Webb asked abruptly.

She blinked. "I—why, I don't know. I'd have to ask grandpa. I never considered— Well, you know what shape we're in."

"I've got fifteen hundred dollars," Webb told her bluntly, "but if I put it in, I'll have to have equal say about what we print."

"You mean—"

"I mean they've got almost everybody in the world scared stiff. They'll push anybody around, just to see if he'll move. Well, I won't. Already they owe me four years' time and three-fifty cash. I think I'd like to have it out of their hides."

"You'll have the State Department here in no time."

"I've been warming up on the Navy for four years; I'm ready for the main event now. Where's grandpa?"

"Home. He has to rest a lot."

"Let's see what he thinks about a transfusion."

Francis Henry Gage had once been a tall, sharp-eyed man with an imposing head of hair. He was thin and bent now, but his eyes had lost none of their keenness, and his craggy white eyebrows gave him the look of a hungry hawk. He listened to his granddaughter and then peered suspiciously at Webb.

"What for?" he demanded. "Thing's dying. Anybody with half an eye can see that. Feller who'd buy into a dying proposition

on impulse—jest because he got mad—ain't likely to do the Courier much permanent good. You a rich playboy type, Mr. Curtis?"

"I've got about fifteen hundred dollars to my name."

"And you want to blow it on the Courier? Don't make sense. There's dozens of papers around that could use your money, son. Papers that ain't going down the drain. How come?"

Webb leaned forward. "Because the Courier's got something they haven't, Mr. Gage. A gimmick. A ready-made, built-in gimmick which, properly exploited, will lift it up by its bootstraps. A quarter of the newsprint in this country deals directly or indirectly with the Russians—usually vague characters tucked away in the Kremlin. The Courier's got forty-five real live ones right on its doorstep. You can name 'em, you know what they eat, when they sleep, how they live. In a free-for-all, my dad always said, there's nothing like knowing who you're swinging at. Me, I'll take Sergei Michanoff! He's my boy!"

Grandpa Gage rubbed his chin, then chuckled. "Even dying, the Courier's worth more'n ten thousand."

"Give you fifteen hundred cash and a note for thirty-five hundred at six per cent, payable out of earnings, for a half interest."

The old man turned his head to Diane. "It's for you to say."

Diane stared at Webb. "Who's the editor?"

He smiled thinly. "I don't care—just as long as I handle the local side."

"The Plum Hill Courier is all local."

"Then I'm the editor," Webb said.

She opened her mouth to retort, then closed it and shrugged. "All right." She smiled wryly at her grandfather. "I guess I haven't done very well, grandpa. But I tried."

The old man put his bony hand over hers. "Honey, I've been prouder of you every day. But times and policies change. Maybe what the Courier needs is a fire-eater."

"Fire-eater?" Webb shook his head. "Why, I doubt if there'll even be any smoke."

By nightfall Webb was installed in the back bedroom of a Mrs. Esther Holt whose penchant for experimental cooking may have had much to do with Mr. Holt's early demise. Webb took her meals in stride, however; Diane Gage was generous with her invitations and was, among her other accomplishments, the kind of cook Mrs. Holt mistakenly considered herself to be.

For two weeks Webb prowled the village and the long neck of land, meeting the inhabitants, trying to absorb their views and customs, making himself known and liked, for he had an unfailing recipe for popularity: he listened.

With both sharing the chores, getting out the *Courier* was no longer the exhausting task Diane had felt it to be. Old Ben Whipple came in for two days, helped set up the paper and ran the press. The first issue was the customary six pages; the second, when Webb wrote his first column, *AROUND THE NECK*, went eight.

There weren't enough ads to justify the increase in size, but there was plenty of local news. Webb's father ran a highly successful weekly in Nebraska, and much of the skill had rubbed off onto his son. People in the Midwest weren't any different from people on the East Coast; they were pleased to see their names in print and more than a little interested in what their neighbors were doing. In addition to Webb's column, there was a new feature in the third issue: a question box entitled *CURIOSITY CORNER*.

It invited readers to ask questions they hadn't been able to answer by a little private snooping: J.E., for instance, wanted to know why it was that although the Russian drivers bought most of their gasoline at the local Plum Hill service stations, none of them ever had the black cars lubricated. Didn't they know it ought to be done every thousand miles?

When Diane came in the next morning she put the mail, including an insured package for Webb, on his desk.

"We're not only widely read, Mr. Editor," she announced, "but our advice is taken."

"Yeah?"

She nodded down the street. "Four black sedans lined up at Jim Edwards' service station. Four bulletheads watching every move Jim makes as he lubricates the car."

Webb grinned and reached for the package. "Sergei there?"

"Sergei is on the rack." Diane smiled. "The lube rack, unfortunately."

Webb unwrapped the package and took out a small, expensive camera. "Dad's been keeping it for me." He stood up. "Guess I'll see if it still works."

"We haven't facilities to print them."

"I know. But we could paste local scenes in the windows. Who knows, maybe the wire services might want a shot of something or other sometime?"

She eyed the camera pensively. "They feel about a camera the way Nature does about a vacuum, you know."

"So I've heard," Webb said.

Wiry Jim Edwards, grease gun in hand, leaned out from under the lubrication rack as Webb paused beside the uplifted car.

"Lo, Webb." Jim eyed the camera and then grinned as Webb suddenly snapped a shot of Sergei Michanoff as he glowered down from the car's front seat, a prisoner of the height.

"No picture!" Sergei barked. The three close-cropped drivers of the other cars looked up at Sergei, as if for orders. Webb wound the film and snapped them before they could turn away.

"No pictures, I tell you!" Sergei was furious. He half opened the door, eying the drop to the ground. It made an interesting action shot. Sergei snapped something, and the other drivers got into their cars, hiding their faces.

Webb nodded to Edwards. "See you, Jim." He walked back down the street, pausing now and then to snap a local scene. He stopped in at the drugstore and left the film with Mark Bevis.

"It's only half used," he said, "but develop it anyway. Soon as you can."

The druggist grinned. "Right now, before you change your mind."

Ten minutes later, one of the black cars pulled in before the Courier office, and Michanoff and another man came stomping in. Webb swung around from his typewriter and Diane slipped out into the pressroom.

Michanoff pointed at the camera on Webb's desk. "The pictures. I want the pictures."

Webb crossed to the counter and looked from Sergei to his companion.

"Buster, you're dreaming."

Michanoff's thick neck got red. "No pictures, you hear me?"

Webb chuckled. "You're in the wrong office, the wrong town and the wrong country. We play different rules."

Sergei's thick lips thinned out in his anger. He went through a fierce inner struggle while his companion eyed him nervously. Then Sergei drew out his wallet.

"I buy the film."

"Nope."

"I buy the camera."

"Nope. *Nyet*," Webb added.

Sergei's black eyes glowed. "Why not?" he demanded.

"You ran me off the road," Webb said softly. "Remember?"

Sergei made one more reluctant attempt at playing the gentleman. "All right. I pay the damage."

"You can't," Webb told him flatly. "Not with money. You're my boy, Buster, and just as I told you before, your diplomatic immunity doesn't extend to me. Now, on your way—unless maybe you want to put in an ad?"

Sergei's face went white. "You will regret this, Mr. Curtis," he hissed. He bared his teeth. "In Huntersville, Nebraska, you will regret it too!"

Webb vaulted over the counter and stood close to Sergei, his eyes blazing behind their glasses.

"Sergei," he said quietly, "you are a dead duck. Believe me, a dead duck."

He stood in the doorway as the two angry men got into their car and drove off. Then he turned quickly, in time to see Diane put down a long iron bar.

"What were you going to do with that?"

She shrugged, then laughed a little awkwardly. "I don't really know. I thought you were going to yell 'Hey, Rube!' and I wanted to be ready."

Webb smiled thinly. "Thanks."

"I heard him," she said. "Whatever you want to do, Webb, I'm with you. Shouldn't you warn your father?"

"Dad?" Webb laughed. "He's kept a pitchfork handy ever since he went out there. There are a lot of rugged people left in this country, Diane. Nebraska's full of 'em." He turned toward the door. "Going to the drugstore," he said casually.

He and Mark Bevis stood in the darkroom, looking at the wet print of Sergei Michanoff glowering down from the upraised car.

"Good," Webb said. "Run a dozen glossy, about four by five, will you?"

Mark chuckled. "O.K. Sure looks mad, don't he?"

"Smiling Jack himself. Say, pass the word to the kids around town that the Courier will pay a buck for every good snapshot of Sergei, will you?"

"How about us older kids?" asked the druggist.

Webb laughed. "You too."

He showed the picture and story to Diane before he sent them off to selected New York and Washington papers and to the wire services. The item read:

Genial, fun-loving, gracious Sergei Michanoff beams for the Plum Hill (Conn.) Courier's photographer. The member of the Russian mission to the United Nations is having his car greased for the first time since its purchase: mileage, 11,213. "Why doesn't somebody tell me these things?" he seems to be asking.

"Cribbed a little from you," Webb said. "Hope you don't mind?"

Diane laughed. "It's all in a good cause."

AROUND THE NECK had the community chuckling when it came out. Webb seemed to be taking the citizens to task about the rumors floating around. It was not true, he pointed out, that the Russians all had cropped hair because they were more susceptible to lice than other humans. And the reason they drove so fast was through sheer exuberance over being in a country where the roads were passable when it rained.

He went on in a like vein, dropping in the name of Sergei Michanoff from time to time, praising him for this, complimenting him for that, stressing his kindness and geniality and helpfulness. The wire services, which had snatched up the photograph, welcomed the column with open arms, and in a matter of hours it was flung across the nation. Plum Hill was on the map.

Letters and phone calls and telegrams flowed in. The country was tickled and wanted more, which Webb was ready to supply. The snapshots of Sergei Michanoff buying gasoline or groceries, or scowling blackly at the camera bugs who popped up out of the darnedest places kept trickling in—and as promptly went out for greater coverage. Michanoff became a synonym for a glowering expression, and in a matter of a couple of weeks' time Sergei's broad face was far better known than that of the ambassador himself.

An early-summer shower had just washed the countryside clean one day when a car pulled up before the office and a tall, well-dressed man got out and approached the door. Diane looked up and then turned amusedly to Webb.

"Let me be the first to say 'I told you so!'"

Webb met the man at the counter. "Afternoon."

The man smiled, nodding pleasantly at Diane. "I'm Wentworth Hastings."

"From the State Department," Webb said. "How's Washington?"

Mr. Hastings had taken his credentials from his pocket. He put them back now. "It's been rather amusing, Mr. Curtis. But, as you can surmise, we've had complaints."

"You refreshed yourself on the Bill of Rights before you came down?" Diane asked idly.

Mr. Hastings nodded. "The First Amendment has given us a good deal of trouble from time to time, Miss Gage. We try to go along with it, though."

"Nice of you," Webb said.

"It's things like this program of yours that sometimes make our work a great deal more difficult."

"You think it's been easy, getting all those shots of Sergei?" Diane demanded.

Mr. Hastings looked a little nonplused. He drew a handkerchief from his breast pocket and patted his lips.

"What we want to know, chiefly, is why?"

Webb leaned across the counter. "Sergei ran me off the road the first day I was here. Bent my fender and punctured a tire."

Mr. Hastings' relief was obvious. "Well, for goodness' sake! Send in a claim! I'll gladly O.K. it!"

"For the American taxpayers to pay?" Diane demanded.

"Well, but—there's a fund; I'd see that it was paid. My goodness!" Mr. Wentworth Hastings reached for his wallet. "I'll pay it myself. How much was the damage?"

"Three dollars and fifty cents," Webb said. "But you won't pay it. This is coming out of Sergei's hide. He's had it, Hastings. He's gotta go."

"But he's a member of the mission! Don't you realize what you're doing?"

"Do we? In another two weeks he'll be better known than Stalin himself," Webb said flatly.

Mr. Hastings looked from one to the other as if he just couldn't believe what he heard. "You won't co-operate?"

"A couple more issues will probably bring in enough ads and

subscribers so we can afford to come out twice a week," Diane offered.

Mr. Hastings nodded curtly. "Good day!"

Webb turned to Diane. "Sure put a fine polish on those fellows, don't they?"

Her eyes danced. "Webb, before they blow us up or throw us in jail or cut our throats or whatever they'll do now, let me say it's been fun. Grandpa thinks it's wonderful too."

Webb smiled oddly and drew from his pocket a letter that was limp from many readings.

"Got kind of a nice note from dad the other day," he said. "Lot of stuff about home and then, 'I used to dream it'd be me, but I can tell you honestly that it's just as good to have your son do it. You and Diane must be quite a team; don't let anything happen to it.'" Webb folded the letter hastily and put it back in his pocket, not looking at her. "I'd told him your name."

"That was thoughtful of you."

"He's right, pretty much of the time."

"Sounds like a very astute man."

She waited, but Webb didn't go on. She smiled wryly when he finally turned to a pile of copy.

"Well, hold down the fort. I've got to buy grandpa's supper."

It was just ten days later that one of the black sedans stopped outside the Courier office. Diane saw it first and stepped quickly into the pressroom, where Webb and Ben Whipple were locking in the forms for the night's run.

"Sergei's here—with friends!"

"Right," Webb said.

He moved into the other room while Ben Whipple helped himself to a pig of lead and Diane hunted frantically for her iron bar.

There were four men in the car at the curb. Sergei sat at the wheel, looking ahead, while a blond giant in the rear seat talked rapidly. Then Sergei got out and came into the office alone.

This was not the old Sergei, the Scourge of the Highways.

Gone was the cold stare, the arrogant, contemptuous look. Dif- fidently he laid three dollars and fifty cents on the counter.

"I have come to pay the damages to your car."

"I told you I wasn't settling for cash," Webb said.

Sergei's eyes, when they met Webb's, seemed glazed. "Please, Mr. Curtis." The words came with difficulty. "Comrade Kosternich has come especially from Moscow because of this."

A little tremor seemed to run through Sergei's stocky frame. Diane, lingering purposefully in the pressroom doorway, put down whatever she held in her hand and came in to stand be- hind the counter with Webb.

"K-O-S-T-E-R-N-I-C-H," Webb spelled, jotting on a piece of pa- per. "He'll be staying?" he asked pleasantly.

Sergei licked his lips. "No, not unless I return to Moscow, Mr. Curtis." He pushed the money gently toward Webb. "You take it, yes?"

Webb put one long forefinger on the fifty-cent piece and moved it around on the bills. Then he cocked his head.

"If I don't, you go home?"

Sergei nodded once.

"But you'd rather stay," Webb observed.

Hope stirred in Sergei's dull eyes. "It is my duty to observe and learn."

"You people would observe a lot more if you drove slower," Diane suddenly remarked.

Sergei turned to her quickly. "That is true!" he agreed.

Webb picked up the money and held it in his hand. Sergei's eyes gleamed.

"I'll bet you've been thinking about fixing your cars so they won't go over forty," Diane said.

Sergei nodded, his eyes still watching the money in Webb's hand. "Ya."

"You've probably even thought of a name for such a device. I'll bet you're going to call it a 'governor.'"

"Ya. A governor." Sergei sighed heavily as Webb finally

slipped the money into his pocket. "Ya, on all the cars, Miss Gagel!"

"You're an inventive people," Webb said dryly. "I'll call the garage and tell Bill Oatway about the gadget you thought up."

Sergei looked his gratitude. "There are things, you know—" He glanced inadvertently toward the window and shrugged a bit. "You understand?"

"We understand," Diane said.

Webb picked up his pipe and began filling it. "See you around, Sergei."

"Ya!"

The black sedan drove sedately away. Webb lit his pipe, got it going and cocked an eye at Diane.

"You're quite a face-saver, aren't you?" he asked.

Diane smiled. "It's like your dad said: In a free-for-all it's nice to know who you're swinging at. As it stands now, we've got a tame bear."

Webb studied her, then grinned. "Dad said something else too."

She saw the look in his eye and turned quickly to open a ledger. "Yes?"

"I might have to be led to water," Webb went on cheerfully, "but I sure know enough to drink when I get there. How do you want this proposal, plain or fancy?"

She turned to him then, her gray eyes dancing.

"Hold the presses, Ben!" she called. "We've got a mighty fancy item coming up!"

MADMAN'S CHAIN

By GILBERT WRIGHT

BY DAWN, Sam Finelace had figured out what he had to do. He eased his lanky body away from Delda, carefully swung his feet to the cabin floor and stood up without disturbing her. Collecting his clothes and shoes, Sam tiptoed barefooted past Peter's crib and through the blanketed doorway into the kitchen. Nine-year-old Gussie was snoring busily in her alcove as he crossed silently to the door and went out. Sam dressed on the back porch, shivering.

The river was a broad area of ghostly motion in the darkness and Quartz Rapids, a mile upstream, was no more than a whisper because the canyon breeze had not yet begun its day. Nothing could be clearly seen except to the east, where, fifteen hundred feet above, a segment of the canyon's rim stood sharp against the gray of dawn.

The chickens were still asleep, but while Sam was going through the tool chest in the lean-to, the old rooster gave a halfhearted crow. Probably the only reason he ever crowed at all was to let the hens know he could; the nearest other rooster was sixty miles upstream.

Sam brought the twenty-foot chain, the two bolts and the hammer to the pine tree in the front yard. He took a turn of

the chain around the tree, slipped a bolt through the last link and then through a link a foot from the trunk, put on a washer and screwed the nut home. Bracing the bolt against a rock, Sam struck repeatedly at the threaded end with the hammer until it became a rivet head over the nut. Nothing but a metal-cutting tool could ever unfasten it.

Taking the free end of the chain in his outheld right hand, Sam found he could get about twelve feet from the tree. Keeping the chain taut, he scuffed a line through the pine needles with his heel all the way around the tree to complete the circle. He then went to the birch clump on the river edge, where he cut a stout six-foot whip.

Returning to the tree, Sam knelt again by the rock and riveted the free end of the chain around his left ankle. He then threw the hammer beyond the circle, felt through his pockets and tossed his knife, matchbox and a few stray nails after the hammer. Next he went over the area of his circle and got rid of every rock and stone that could be dangerous if thrown. There wasn't anything else he could think to do, so he sat down facing the cabin.

The Finelace homestead was in a crescent bend of the river with a sand bar along the shore where the cabin was and about eight acres of box canyon with good black soil and a cold little stream full of water cress. There was a big truck garden, some berry bushes and fruit trees, a corn patch and a sizable wheat field. There were six pigs and around thirty chickens. But mostly the Finelaces ate the wild meat Sam got with the 410 or the .30-.30.

Sam and Delda had begun their married life trying to operate a country store near Twin Falls. But they were both farm-raised and, by the time the store failed, they knew where they really belonged. The only way they could get a farm for themselves was to take up land so isolated that most people wouldn't have considered it. Sam and Delda didn't mind being so far from anybody; besides, they had too much to do to get lonely.

And now their little farm supported them well; they were independent and unbehoden.

There was no road, or even a trail, to the Finelaces. The only way to get to civilization was to walk upstream along the river rocks, and when a cliff came down and cut you off, you had to climb to the main ridge and around to get back on the river again. It was sixty miles to Saddler's ranch, but there the road began and it was only twelve miles of easy walking to Burnt Pine, where there were stores, telephones, and a state highway.

Sam always walked out in October. He would have six or seven ounces of placer gold and a pack of choice skins. This would bring around three hundred dollars, which was enough cash for what store-boughten things the Finelaces needed and to buy the lumber and nails to build a scow to float home in. Once he got home, Sam would take the scow apart, straighten the nails, and maybe build a shed or add to the flume that brought working water to his placer.

The sun was turning the western rim of the canyon orange; when it became bright gold the light would come in through the cabin window and wake Delda. The sun was the only clock the Finelaces had or needed.

In a little while Sam could smell coffee. Then Delda called from the back door.

Sam stood up. "I'm out here!" he called. "You'd best bring Gussie too!"

Presently Delda and Gussie came around the side of the cabin; the Finelaces hardly ever used the front door.

Sam stepped forward and pointed at the scuffed line with his whip. "Don't come closer than that."

Delda's brown eyes were alight and she was ready to smile because Sam often started the day with some little joke and she thought there was going to be one now. But as she looked at Sam the half-born smile died and her color went with it.

"Daddy's chained himself up," observed Gussie, in her flat little voice.

Delda's arm went across the girl's back and held her close. "What is it, Sam?"

"Last night when I was putting the potatoes in the root cellar there was a skunk in the bin," said Sam. He held out his right hand. "He bit me. I poked iodine in the tooth holes and it feels all right."

"You didn't say anything."

"I hadn't figured out what to do then."

"There wasn't any skunk smell."

"Something was wrong with him," said Sam. "After he bit me he fell out of the bin and ran around on the floor. He would go sideways and fall down, and then pick himself up and start off again until he ran into something. The door was open all the time, but he never seemed to notice it."

With a cry of wild protest Delda was in Sam's arms. He held her tightly.

Gussie, without knowing the reason, began sobbing.

Sam gave Delda a last hug and pushed her away. "Now get over the line and stay there."

Little Peter came around the cabin, toddling stiff-leggedly in his sleeping suit. He reached Delda and tugged at her skirt.

Without taking her eyes from Sam, Delda spoke to Gussie, "Take Peter in and feed him his mush."

Gussie started around the side of the cabin with Peter, then changed her mind and went in by the front door. She left it open.

Delda asked unsteadily, "Sam, did it— Was its mouth foamy?"

He nodded. "I killed it and saved the head."

"The brains will show the doctors if it was mad, won't they?"

"I've heard so. I do know they examine a dog's head."

"Sam"—her voice stopped and she couldn't say anything until she had swallowed—"do you know how long—I mean, how soon after—"

He shook his head. "Might happen any time, for all I know. I've heard that an animal that gets it is afraid of water." He

looked at the river for a moment, then smiled ruefully. "It doesn't bother me yet."

"Oh, Sam——" Delda covered her face with her hands and slumped to her knees, her slim body shuddering with sobs.

"Aw, honey——" He started to her, extended arms, but the chain jerked him to a cruel halt. "Please, Delda—don't give way."

Sam saw Gussie standing in the door, looking at them. "Go back to Peter, Gussie. We'll tell you about it later."

Delda stood up and went over to the porch and sat down facing Sam, her hand holding a roof support.

He made his voice matter-of-fact. "I've thought things out the best I could, Delda. We've had our troubles before—like the time Gussie had the fever—and we've licked them by ourselves. But this time it looks like we'd have to have outside help."

Delda was no longer crying; the dark eyes in the white face pleaded that Sam would know what to do. Sam usually did.

"Now then," he said easily, "if I started to walk out and it took hold on me before I got to Saddler's—well, I'd likely come to my end in the river or off a cliff." His voice lowered. "But, Delda, I might come back here. A madman don't know what he's doing. I might come back here and do something awful to you and the children. It would be the same thing if we all tried to go out together. If it was to come on me, there wouldn't be anything you could do to protect them and yourself—without you shot me. I don't think I could trust you to do that."

She shook her head quickly.

"You could leave me here with what food I'd need and chained up so's if I did get sick I couldn't come after you, and you could try to get out with the kids. But I don't think you'd make it."

"I'll go alone," said Delda, rising. "Gussie can take care of you and Peter."

He nodded. "That's the only way. If we make Gussie understand that she must never come to where I can reach her or

bring me anything I could use to get loose——” He thought a moment. “Is the file you used to sharpen the cleaver still in the kitchen?”

“Yes, I think so.”

“Well, get it and the cleaver too. Put them in the tool chest and lock it and take the key with you. Find the hatchet and put it in. The crowbar’s leaning against the west side of the hog house. Throw it and the ax up on the porch roof.”

“And I’ll take the head?”

He nodded. “Hang it out nights and wrap it up at sunrise.”

Delda got up on the porch and started for the door. “I’ll hurry, Sam. I’ll get to Saddler’s as fast as ever I can. He’s got a truck and will take me to the Forest Station and they’ll——”

“Wait,” said Sam sharply. “Stand still a minute, Delda. I think you can get to Saddler’s in four or five days, but not if you hurry. If you crowd yourself you’ll fold up before you’re half started. Go slow and when you get tired, rest. Don’t take a step after dark, but build a good fire against a down log. Take the 410. It will get you a squirrel or a grouse when you’re on the mountain. Take one of the big gang hooks and some string. When you’re on the river you can tie the hook to a stick and snag yourself a squaw fish in any still pool.”

She saw Sam’s knife and matchbox lying outside the circle and stepped off the porch to pick them up.

“Take plenty of matches,” said Sam. “Better take the blue comfort too; it’ll be cold nights. Take a little salt to flavor your food, if you want. But that’s all. Every ounce is going to weigh a ton.”

Delda looked up the great canyon for a moment. “The times we walked out I didn’t pay too much mind to the way we went, because you knew.”

“It pretty much repeats,” said Sam easily. “Like from here you can walk along the river until the cliff comes down at the rapids, so you go up the little canyon this side. Go clear to the main ridge and then along it. Skip the next two canyons; the

third will take you back down to the river again." He thought for a moment. "There's four other places you'll have to climb around—five, if the river should rise." He paused.

Presently he thought of something else. "Whenever you have to leave the river, drink all the water you can hold. Never try to save time by climbing along the side of a canyon where there's been a slide and the rocks are lying loose. You'll slip pretty near as much as you gain and there's danger of bringing the whole thing down on you."

Sam considered again. "If you come on a mountain lion or a bear just stay where you are until it goes away. You'll likely get rimrocked a few times—I mean, when you're coming down some canyon you'll find it ending in a cliff. Don't try to get down it, but go back up to the ridge and find another canyon. Remember you can't get clear lost as long as you keep coming back to the river." He smiled. "It flows right past Saddler's, so you're mortal certain to get there if you stick to it."

A half hour later Sam watched as Delda picked her way upstream along the river rocks. The rolled blue comfort was tied diagonally across her back and the 410 swung in her hand. At the first turn she waved, then disappeared.

Gussie sat on the porch, looking steadily at her father. Behind her, in his play pen, Peter banged on a tin pan.

Sam smiled at Gussie. "So you're going to be the mother in our home for a while."

"I can do it fine."

"Of course you can. But I was thinking. The thing is, we might make some changes that would be more fun. Suppose you didn't do any cooking in the house; you could set up two flat stones and cook right here in the yard where I could watch. Wouldn't that be fun?"

This didn't appear practical to Gussie. "What if it rains?"

"Oh, we could eat cold things until it cleared up."

"Peter ought to have his mush hot," said Gussie with authority. "He won't eat cold mush, even with more sugar."

"Well." Sam felt helpless. "The thing is, honey, I'd rather you

wouldn't light any matches in the house. If a fire was to start, I couldn't do anything to help."

"I've lit the stove lots of times, and the lamp, too, just like mamma."

Sam's voice rose sharply. "Gussie, there won't be any lighting of matches in the house. Do you understand that?"

Gussie's lip quivered. "If I'm going to be the mother, then I ought to cook on the stove and light the lamps like a mother."

Sam gave in. "I suppose that's so. But, dear, our home and even our lives depend on you now. Be very careful of fire."

Gussie nodded. "Daddy," she asked, after looking steadily at him for a long moment, "what's the matter with you?"

"Why, nothing at all right now."

"But there's going to be?"

"I don't think so——" He paused. "I just don't know, Gussie. I might get to acting very strange and wild. I just don't know." He pointed to the line with his whip. "Mamma told you about that?"

"She said it was a game; for me not to cross over it."

Sam shook his head. "No, it's not a game. It's dead serious. When you bring me food put it in the aluminum pan, and when I see you coming with it I'll go to the other side of the circle behind the tree. Then you put the pan on the line and get back."

"Suppose you don't go over to the other side of the circle?"

"Then you'll know I'm sick. I won't need any food then. And if I ever ask you to get me anything I could use to get loose with, you'll know for certain I'm bad sick and you're not to mind a word I tell you."

Gussie shook her head in puzzlement. "If you get sick are you going to die?"

"We won't worry about that now. Just remember never to bring me anything that would get me loose. And never, no matter what, come to where I can reach you."

Peter's pan rolled through the bars of the play pen and Gussie got up to retrieve it. "I'd best get to sweeping; the house is a mess."

Sam sat down, his back against the pine. He tried to remember all he had ever heard about madness. Madmen were unnaturally strong; they raved in their strength and killed anything they could get at. Then there was the clever, scheming kind of madness. This would be the worst. Gussie would keep away if he got to raving; but suppose his madness didn't show—suppose it made him try to work a scheme on Gussie so he could get her.

Sam didn't think a madman would have to be very clever to work a scheme on his nine-year-old daughter.

He stood up and took a long look at the river. It didn't affect him, so he was still all right and it would be safe to do what he had to do. The sweat broke out on him as he called Gussie.

She came to the front door.

"You'd better sleep in mamma and daddy's room with Peter."

She nodded competently. "I've already moved my things in."

"Good girl. But I'm going to need your blankets and mattress out here. Suppose you can do it? Bring the things one at a time."

As she turned Sam stopped her. "Gussie, remember what I said?"

"About the circle?"

"About the circle. Don't put anything down where I can reach it until I'm clear on the other side away from you."

Gussie nodded and ran inside. When she came out with the pillow and the first blanket Sam walked away. But Gussie dropped her armful on the line before Sam had reached the other side of the circle. She hurried back into the cabin. Sam took two long steps toward the bedding. But when she came out with the remaining blankets she was too intent on her job to look at Sam. She dropped them and went back for the mattress.

Sam could hear her having trouble with it. She appeared in the doorway, where the mattress stuck, but she worried it loose, got it across the porch and into the yard.

By now Sam was standing by the blankets. He held out his left hand. "Here you come, Gussie!"

She brought it directly to him, red-faced and panting.

Sam's hand closed tightly on her arm; then he struck her savagely three times across the legs with his whip.

Gussie screamed. She stood stock-still, staring at him in wide-eyed disbelief, before she ran shrieking into the cabin.

He yelled after her, "I told you never to come where I could reach you!" He then flung down the whip and went to the other side of the pine, leaned his forearm against it and cried.

The sun was in the center of the canyon when, without looking in Sam's direction, Gussie came out and took Peter inside for his lunch.

When he saw her come out with the aluminum pan and a cup, Sam went quickly to the other side of the circle. Only then did Gussie come to the line, and the moment she put down the food she returned to the cabin. Sam told her the lunch smelled wonderful, but Gussie ignored him and went inside, closing the door.

Later, Sam saw the flash of a white cloth over the front window; Gussie was industriously cleaning it while Peter, probably, was taking his nap. A feeling of love and pride came to Sam. Gussie was so like Delda. When he and Delda had a falling out—which was rare, though it happened—she would ignore him and turn furiously to housecleaning.

Delda. Sam knew where she would be about now. She'd be a mile up the canyon from the river, crawling over boulders as she worked her way to the ridge. Every hundred feet she'd have to stop and lie there until her breath came back and the numb ache left the front of her thighs. She'd hear her heart in her ears like the sound of a faraway gas-engine pump. He hoped she'd drunk deeply of the river—there'd be no water on the ridge where she'd stop tonight.

Gussie came out on the porch and set to cleaning that side of the window.

Sam called her softly. Her hand stopped instantly in its sweep across the glass, but she did not turn. "I had to hurt you, so's you'd remember about the circle."

She left the window and came to the edge of the porch, but

she did not look up and her voice was barely audible. "While Peter's sleeping, maybe I ought to catch us some trout."

Sam agreed heartily. Gussie smiled slightly; then hurried into the cabin for the fly swatter. Sam watched as she stalked grasshoppers for bait in the sunny place by the henhouse. She looked a little like a grasshopper herself when she hunched.

After supper Sam watched tensely as she carried the lamp from the kitchen to the bedroom. He could tell from the shadows when she was putting on Peter's sleeping suit and lifting him into his crib. Then the lamp went out. Sam sighed with relief.

He slept part of the night, then woke with a dream of burning his hand on the lamp. He felt the fleshy part below the base of the little finger where the tooth marks were. The place didn't seem swollen and it wasn't very sore, but when he clenched his fist a spark of pain flashed in his armpit.

Sam went cold and hollow with fear. In his mind he could see what was going on; two tiny streams colored red and carrying madness in little pulsing throbs came from the bite holes. They met at the wrist and, twining themselves like a bean vine, were growing up inside his arm. When they reached the shoulder they would turn inward and find his neck and keep on growing until they were in his head. There they would continue to grow and curl round and round into a great coiled knot of madness.

He got up and walked his circle for the rest of the night. And at sunrise he still walked; only now he was careful not to look at the river as he came to that part of his circle. Then, in spite of himself, he did see the water. Nothing happened. Sam stared at the river for a long time.

After the children woke and Gussie had called good morning to him before taking Peter into the kitchen, Sam felt better. The pain wasn't any worse. Maybe it was nothing after all but the sort of blood poisoning you can get from a cut or a splinter. He knew what to do about that.

So all that day Sam lay with his arm in the roasting pan filled

with warm water in which a three-pound sack of epsom salts had been dissolved. Every hour or so he carried the pan to the line so that Gussie could take it into the kitchen and reheat it. That night, after she was asleep, he continued to soak his arm, and the next morning there was no pain at all, no matter how hard he shut his fist. But just to be sure, he and Gussie continued the treatment all that day.

At sundown a storm began. From the lightning and the time it took to hear the thunder, the storm was centered six or seven miles up the canyon. The rain was heavy.

Gussie brought him the tarp and the wicker clothes basket. He laid the heavy canvas over his bed, stuck his head inside the basket, and pulled the canvas over that. He'd keep dry enough.

In the morning it would be the fourth day since Delda left; most of her hard struggle would be over now—with any luck. He wondered where she would be tonight in this storm. Maybe coming down that little canyon beyond Steelhead Rapids. He tried to think of places around there where she could shelter from the storm and have a fire, but nothing came to mind.

The morning was clear. As always, now, Sam moved to the riverbank the first thing after he woke up and looked steadily at the water for a time. It didn't bring on any fear this time either, but Sam was puzzled. He couldn't understand why the river should have dropped a good two feet overnight. If anything, it should have risen because of the heavy rain.

All the forenoon Sam kept an eye on the river. It was still falling and by now bottom rocks had appeared that he had never seen before, even in the driest summer. By noon the river was half gone.

Then the reason for the falling river came to Sam with the force of sudden panic. He yelled for Gussie and the urgency of his voice brought her from the kitchen, dragging Peter by the hand.

"Get a rock or something and smash the tool chest and bring me the hammer and a cold chisel. Hurry, Gussie, the water's coming! The whole river will be down on us!"

She looked at him without saying a word. She began to cry. Pushing Peter ahead of her, she went inside the cabin and shut the door. Sam knew his terrible mistake. He had been excited and had asked for tools. He should have explained that somewhere upriver a big slide had occurred. The river was damming up behind it, and when it did break through it would come down the canyon in a solid wall.

The river was still falling.

Sam made his voice as kindly and as pleading as he could, calling for Gussie again and again to please come out on the porch, just for a minute. Finally the door did open the width of Gussie's face, but she did not come out. Sam asked her to look at the river and see how low it was, and he calmly explained about the slide and the great danger. But even as he talked he could see that she was not taking in anything he said. She just stared at him with horrified eyes, her small white hands squirming together at her waist. And the need to make her understand was so very great that, in spite of himself, Sam's voice rose. He was shouting orders at her before he realized it. He made his voice quiet again. "Please, darling—I'm not sick. I'm scared!" He could tell she was going to speak, and paused.

Her voice was very low. "You told mamma you'd be scared of water."

"The river!" yelled Sam. "The river is coming down on us! I won't ask you to help me get loose, but you take Peter and get up on the hill above the root cellar. Please, please——"

She began sobbing as she turned her face away and slowly closed the door.

Anyone seeing Sam now would have been sure he was mad. He was on all fours, frantically clawing a hole. It was an hour before he got through the coarse river gravel to a boulder top. Another hour passed in widening the hole until his searching fingers at last found a rock suited to his purpose. It was heavy, about ten inches by four. Stretching the chain over the boulder top, Sam set to pounding one of the links with his rock.

And as he pounded he didn't feel right about what he was doing. If he got free the madness might come on him, but, then, the river might come too. Sam didn't know if the river or himself was the greater danger to the children. One thing: he was sure he was all right now. Then Sam began to wonder how he knew this. Suppose he was mad now; suppose he only imagined about the river. How could he really tell?

He stopped pounding and considered throwing the rock outside the circle. Then it seemed to him that if he were mad he couldn't be wondering if he were. "As long as I think I might be crazy," he murmured, "I'm probably all right." He fell to pounding again. Once he was loose, he'd take the kids to a safe place as fast as he could and chain himself up again. If the river took the house, there would still be food that Gussie could get to in the root cellar.

Several times during the afternoon Sam saw that Gussie was watching him from the front window. He also saw that she had his Winchester. She'd never fired the rifle, but Sam was sure she knew how it worked.

By night the river was about one third normal size and didn't seem to be going lower. The dam was holding longer than Sam would have thought possible. He knew that if the river started to rise slowly it would mean that the water was finding a way around or over the dam. It wouldn't come all at once then. But the river wasn't rising, so far as Sam could see.

He continued to pound. By dark the link felt slightly flat to his fingers. He was making headway at beating it through. Then Gussie took the lamp into the bedroom, but after she had put Peter in his crib the lamp still burned. Sam could tell from the shadows on the wall that Gussie was sitting up on the bed. The shadow of the Winchester was there too.

Along in the night the pounding rock split and for a moment Sam felt hopeless. But one piece was still pretty heavy and there was now a sharp edge. After pounding with it awhile, Sam could feel that the edge was making little nicks across the flat

place in the link. He couldn't see where he was hitting, but his pounding motions were so well set by now that he thought he was hitting right most of the time.

It grew light, and as the western cliff took on an orange glow, the link was almost paper thin. Then Sam heard a faint, eddying roar far up the canyon. Here it came! The roar swelled, died down to almost nothing, then came up again, stronger, starting echoes from the canyon walls. Sam pounded frantically. The link was cut through now, in a thin line.

Then a bright piece flaked off and the crack was a quarter of an inch wide. Sam placed the next link across the crack and pulled against the pine tree with all his strength. The link snapped through and Sam was free.

The roaring was very loud in the canyon as Sam ran into the cabin. Gussie was asleep, snoring, the cocked rifle beside her. She woke when Sam picked her up, screamed in terror as she saw him. But by then Sam had Peter under the other arm and was headed for the back door.

He got them up the hill above the root cellar and let Gussie go. She ran off a little way and stopped, looking at him, ready to run again. Peter was still half asleep, and Sam put him down.

There was no longer any roaring sound.

And the river—the river had risen during the night to normal. There couldn't be any wall of water now.

But the roaring that, only a moment ago, had filled the canyon with echoing sound—Sam couldn't understand at all. He stared at the river below him and as far up as the bend.

The golden light from the western cliff bathed the Finelace homestead with bright radiance; it was the time he and Delda always woke.

Then Delda called his name, long and sweet. He whirled. She was running toward him in a slant up the hill. Behind her walked two men, one wearing a Forest Ranger's uniform, the other carrying a doctor's bag. And behind them, in the middle of the wheat field, was one of those flying machines that can go straight up and down.

"It's all right!" called Delda, as she came on. "You won't get it, Sam—the doctor says so! There's time to give you shots!"

The doctor, standing below with the ranger, heard her. He smiled up at Sam, nodded, and lifted his bag in a confident manner.

Delda and Sam met and clung. After a moment, Gussie came to them, pried one of Sam's fingers from Delda's back and held on to it. Peter was making hungry sounds.

THE GIRL WITH THE GLOW

By HARRIET FRANK, Jr.

THE minute I tell anybody that I'm a librarian, they look at me as if I were the last rose of summer. Well, it just so happens that I am a librarian in a Hollywood library, and I guess I know as much about life as the next person. It's true that I was born and brought up in Pasadena, but last spring I moved into an apartment right near Sunset Boulevard. The closets are awfully small, but the whole building is kidney-shaped, and lit up at night and considered very sophisticated. I wouldn't ordinarily get so personal about myself, except that I think it's high time somebody made it clear that librarians are people. We do not all wear our hair in little buns. Some of us don't even need glasses. I do, but I only wear them in the movies when nobody is looking at me. What I'm trying to say is there are married librarians, engaged librarians, librarians who are mothers, even beautiful librarians.

I'm not saying that I'm a raving beauty or anything like that. As a matter of fact I'm only medium pretty. To be absolutely honest about it, I'm concave where it would be nicer to be convex, but I buy blouses with ruffles, so who knows the difference? As far as I can see, it's a wonderful career for a young woman. Statistically I'm given a very good chance of getting married—

we had three weddings in two years and one engagement—and that keeps me in a cheerful frame of mind. While nothing has developed along that line for me, it's not out of the question. Men come and go all day long through the library. NBC and CBS are just around the corner from us, and the RKO people drop in all the time. We do a lot of historical research for them, and once I even talked to Kirk Douglas over the telephone. He wanted to know something about men's haircuts during the Renaissance. He was awfully nice and sent me a personal thank-you note.

A public library's no tomb, you know. It's full of human interests. Take our out-of-work movie actor who keeps a clean shirt hidden in the stacks just between American History and Biography. It's sort of his home away from home. He's done it for months, but we pretend we don't know about it; it's our contribution to his morale. Then there's our Tennessee Williams-type Southern lady who comes in early every morning and studies the Dun & Bradstreet reports all day long. She says it relaxes her to read about money, and if it weren't for us she'd feel lonely and out of things. We also cater to the neighborhood school children, to people who wish to get out of the sun, to teachers, tailors, cowboys and sailors. And last week we got a girl with a glow.

At least that's the way she was described to me. I was working the Wednesday-afternoon shift on the Reference Desk when Peter Ronson came in. He's a very important director with Atlas pictures. Not that he looks like much. He's kind of a tall Mr. Peepers with smoldering overtones. I mean, he doesn't wear loud shirts, or drive a foreign sports car, or smoke a pipe, or anything at all exotic. He doesn't even have a crew haircut. And he doesn't call girls "honey," like some staff writers I could mention. He just ambled up, read my name on my desk plate and apologized for bothering me.

"I know you're busy, Miss Baker," he said, "but I'd like to talk to you."

"I'm here to help you," I said.

"I don't know," he said, wrenching at his dark blue tie. "This is a kind of personal matter."

I could see he was upset. "We get asked all sorts of questions," I told him delicately. "But if you'd care to write it down—"

"I'm looking for a girl," he blurted.

I promptly turned shocking pink.

"What are you turning that color for?" he demanded. "It's nothing like that." He scowled at me sternly. "What do you think I am—a masher?"

I laughed nervously. "Then it's something fictional," I said in a relieved tone.

"Fictional, my eye. She's about five feet six, weighs about a hundred and seventeen, long silky hair, a delicate profile, very good legs."

"See here!" I interposed crisply.

He went on, as if lost in a dream, "It's funny. It sounds crazy, but she had an aura—a glow."

"How nice for her," I said, "but I can hardly be expected—"

He looked at me appealingly. "She was in here a week ago. On a Monday. About one-thirty in the afternoon. She was standing in the drama section. I watched her. The way she moved—beautiful."

"Yes. Well," I said uneasily, "if you'll excuse me now—"

"I should have spoken to her then," he continued. "I wanted to, but I couldn't seem to move. She affected me that way. Not only me. Everybody. Everybody in the place was looking at her. She had flair," he said urgently, "real presence. I've been in here every day and night for a week, waiting for her to show up again. I've got to find her." He leaned on my desk and looked at me pathetically. "You've got to help me find her."

"I'm here to answer questions," I said gently, "everything from anfractuosity to zymosis. Girls with glow are outside my province."

"Let me buy you a cup of coffee," he pleaded. "Let me tell you the whole story."

I should have said no. Instead I went to get my hat, wishing fervently that I hadn't put on my second-best cotton that morning. It isn't every day that the man who made *Northern Lights* (Cinemascope) and *Six Loves* (Vistavision) asks me to step out with him.

Once outside on the library steps, he paused and looked around him like a bear in spring, blinking and shaggy. "Where can we go?" he asked. "This is a long story. I don't want to be interrupted."

"I'd only have time for a synopsis," I told him. "Our coffee breaks are only for ten minutes."

"No, no," he growled; "that's no good." Then he added in a vague sort of way, "All right, I'll pick you up for dinner. Six o'clock, huh? And meanwhile keep your eye out for the girl, will you? If she comes in, you're sure to spot her. She gives off a kind of a shine."

He patted my arm absently and slouched off down the street before I could say yes, no or maybe. I stumbled back inside, a trifle dazed. All afternoon long I answered the phone on the Reference Desk. I told people about Herodotus, where to find advice on the care and feeding of tropical birds, and who was the latest authority on Far Eastern affairs. I tracked down mythical figures in Greek literature, Theda Bara's leading men in early silent films and four books of source material on Elizabeth Barrett Browning.

The entire time I speculated on what made a girl glow. Toward six o'clock I gave up and decided to settle on a new make-up job, a dab of borrowed perfume and a look of pleased anticipation. They were all lost on Mr. Ronson. He breezed in fifteen minutes late, planted his arms on my desk and asked breathlessly if I'd made any progress.

"I'm afraid not," I said.

He sighed disconsolately. "Too bad. Well, maybe if I go into it a little more with you——"

"Look," I said, "I don't think I ought to go out with you under false pretenses. I don't think I can help you out at all, and I think you'd better understand that before you buy me an expensive dinner."

"What's the matter?" he inquired. "Aren't you hungry?"

"Yes, I'm hungry. I'm also honest."

"Sure, sure," he said, as if he hadn't heard a word. "Where do you want to eat?"

"Where do you usually eat?" I asked brightly.

"Oh, drive-ins, hash houses—wherever I happen to be."

"That's not very sensible," I said. "You'd better come home with me and let me give you a healthy dinner."

He looked at me with furrowed brows. "You mean you'd cook something?"

"Yes, indeed," I said proudly. "Something good."

"Well, I'll be darned," he said.

While he went to get the car, I planned dinner. I knew my apartment would be neat and tidy. My father, who comes over from Pasadena once a week to see how I'm getting along, always comments on how neat and tidy I am, so there would be no worry on that score. Nor would dinner be a problem. I'd baked gingersnaps the night before, because when I don't have a date and feel blue about it, I always make gingersnaps. I had stuff for salad and some cold roast chicken in the icebox. There was also French bread and strawberry jam, which my mother brought for me when she came over from Pasadena to see how I was getting along.

As soon as we got to my place, I fixed him tomato juice and vanished into the kitchen. I suppose a Martini would have been more worldly, but with my parents coming over from Pasadena all the time, I have only tomato juice in the house. He sat down and started to drink it, but a moment later he appeared behind me in the kitchen, arms akimbo.

"About this girl—" he began.

The sense of faint elation I had been feeling, having a nice

man in my living room drinking tomato juice, vanished. "Yes?" I went on cleaning the radishes with an air of imperturbability.

"If she was reading plays in the drama section, maybe she checked one out, huh?"

"It's possible," I said, concentrating on the cucumber.

"O.K.," he said promptly. "All we have to do is run down all the plays that went out this week, track down the addresses, and we've got her."

"No, you haven't," I countered sharply, "because the library is not allowed to give out information like that, except to the F. B. I."

"O.K.," he said, "O.K. Now we know where we stand. But let me assure you this low cunning will get you nowhere. I'm one of the best directors in the country, and when I want what I want, I get it."

"I think I'll just fix the salad dressing," I said loftily.

"Are you a human being or a bureaucrat?" he cried, following me. And then he nodded his head ferociously. "I know what it is. You don't want to see this kid get a break."

"That's a mean, spiteful thing to say," I said, with my eyes beginning to get teary. "I'm not like that at all. And will you kindly go into the other room? I can't cook when I'm flustered, and you'll be pleased to hear that I am flustered." I waved him toward the door.

"I don't want your food!" he bellowed. "I want your help!"

"I know," I said, slamming the icebox door; "you've told me."

"Hard as nails," he muttered.

"What did you say?"

"I said you were a machine! A book-vending machine!"

"Dinner is now ready," I announced, "and since meals should be eaten serenely, I'd appreciate it very much if you'd stop making personal remarks till we're finished."

Grumpily he followed me into the other room and pulled my chair. Then he sat down opposite me, shoved my best china out of his way and leaned toward me. "Why? That's all I ask. Why?"

Somebody discovered Lana Turner in a drugstore. Did he have this kind of trouble with the soda jerk? No. He had co-operation. He found her."

"Libraries are different," I said unhappily. I toyed listlessly with a chicken wing. "She certainly impressed you," I said, watching him wolf down my good food as if it were sawdust and ashes.

"Most fascinating woman I ever saw," he mumbled.

"She must be something special—something more than just beautiful, I guess?"

He stopped eating and stared out the window. "She had extras all right," he said dreamily.

I made little bread crumbs out of bigger ones. "I—I suppose if you did find her—it would make *you* happy—personally, I mean."

He looked at me, startled. He even put his fork down. "I hadn't thought about it that way," he said, almost to himself. He then sat there and proceeded to think about it. I saw the idea take root, grow and put forth flowers. A pleased smile crossed his face.

"Have something more to eat." I tried desperately to divert him. He ate seconds and thirds in a desultory way, but I could see that the die was cast. A girl had become the girl—all while he was eating my fried chicken. I could see plainly that even if I had been wired for electricity, I couldn't begin to hold a candle to the glow girl. Anyway, I told myself, a really mature person enjoys other people's happiness, and he only came into my bailiwick because he wanted to find her. "There's one thing we could try," I said, sighing deeply. "It might not work, but we could try."

"Great, great! What is it?"

"Well, we check out our books by microfilm. The reels run about two hundred feet before they are cut and read. I read the film."

"I get it. You'll be able to spot the drama check-outs and fol-

low them up." He got up and walked around the room, elated. "We're practically home," he said happily.

"You haven't heard my proposal," I said stiffly. "The most I can possibly do is run down the girl you have described and tell her about you and your inordinate interest in her. Then, if she's at all intrigued, I will tell her where she can get in touch with you."

He sat down again and reached across the table. Then he patted me as if I were a good dog, and beamed. "I knew you'd do it," he said. "You have nice brown eyes."

"We have vanilla ice cream for dessert, with gingersnaps," I said and ran into the kitchen. Once I was safely out of his range, I peered miserably at myself in the kitchen mirror. It was all very well to be open-hearted and generous and all that, but I liked him myself. Well, one thing was certain. If and when I found Miss AC-DC, I was going to make a thorough study of her in the hope that some of the shine would come off on me.

"How about a movie?"

I jumped nervously and made blindly for the ice cream. "Well," I said, "we've had our little talk, and this wasn't really a date."

"Hey," he said gently, "wait a minute. I'm not just a callous exploiter of librarians. I'd like to take you to the movies. It's one I made. It's good too."

Since it didn't seem likely that I'd ever see him again, except as part of a threesome, I accepted. We drove out to Atlas and he had the picture run off in a projection room. It was a lovely movie. I laughed and cried and generally made a fool of myself. When the lights came up, my lipstick was all eaten off; I was blotchy with tears and I had the hiccups.

He turned and looked at me with a funny grin. "Say," he said, "you take things big, don't you?"

I still felt like crying, so I just nodded my head and tried to hold my breath at the same time.

"I'll get you a drink of water," he said, and as he got up he

rumpled his hand over my head. That was just what my father used to do when I lived at home in Pasadena. It made me cry even harder, but by the time he got back I had begun to dab at my ruined make-up.

"Leave it off," he said. "You don't need that tripe. You've got an honest little face. Let it show."

"I'd like to say something," I said. "I can see by this movie that you're really a very sensitive and artistic person, and any reservations I may have had about you I don't have any more, and I hope I do find that girl, because she can't help but benefit by it and—"

"Take a breath," he suggested; "you're beginning to gasp."

"—and I hope you'll both be very happy," I ended.

"How old are you?" he asked suddenly.

"Twenty-one."

"When I was twenty-one," he remarked reflectively, "I didn't give a rat's eyelash about anybody else being happy." He paused. "Hiccups gone?"

Hiccups, hopes—everything seemed to be gone, but I managed a smile. "I'll do my best to find her, Mr. Ronson," I said.

"Call me Pete."

"Pete," I echoed shyly.

"Look," he said, "I don't want to kibitz but—well, this whole thing is pretty important to me now and— What I want to know is, what are you going to tell her about me?" He stood there like a little boy kicking stones, and suddenly I wanted to call the whole thing off.

"I'll simply tell her that you saw her and admired her and want to hear her read for you. I'll tell her that you seem very pleasant and reliable and—"

He cut me off. "Is that all? Tell her she knocked me off my heels. Tell her I think she's radiant, special, a great possibility for films. Tell her I understand women."

"I have no way of knowing that," I said, a bit waspishly.

"I've been nice to you, haven't I?"

"Yes."

"So tell her!"

"Mr. Ronson," I said, "I shall try to find the young lady and put her in touch with you. You may then tell her or the marines. I'd like to go home now."

He took me back to the apartment, gave me a friendly hand-shake, his phone number and the information that he slept late in the mornings.

The next night after work, I put my back into it. I discovered that fifty-two people had availed themselves of our dramatic literature during the past week; forty of them were men—three were steady patrons whom I knew by sight. That left one dozen females in assorted sizes and shapes. I made a neat alphabetical list, hoping that one of the names might give off the same kind of emanations its owner was said to shed. Then I read them aloud in the washroom, on the theory that a rose by any other name might just do the trick.

"Mitzi Armstrong," I began, "Arna Belgrave, Susan Dietrick, Gela Gray, Mary Homer, Louise Jerrico, Sally Kirk, Sarah Lois, Barbara Otter, Diane Payne, Joan Sills and Trilby Taylor."

Nothing happened. I then took a dollar and twenty cents' worth of dimes and retired to the phone booth. An hour and seventeen minutes later, the field was narrowed to Sally, Louise and Trilby, all of whom had been in the library at the right time in the right place. I asked all three if I might come to see them on a personal matter. Sally said to come after eight, since she had five kids and you couldn't hear yourself think in her house until they had gone to bed; Louise wanted to know if it had anything to do with her ex-husband, one Herman Hosering, because "she wasn't having any further dealings with that bum"; and Trilby, whose voice sounded like the wind in the willows, asked me to call first to make sure she was in.

I began with Sally, who turned out to be a pleasant, harassed little woman. She told me that she'd been looking for something suitable for a children's performance at a P.T.A. tea, and had she done something wrong? I reassured her, thanked her for her time and retreated.

Louise, a lady whom diet and determination kept from being a stylish stout, let it be known that if I had any connection whatsoever with Herman Hosering or any of the Hosering family, she wanted no part of me. I murmured something about mistaken identity and made for the door. This left the last but likely Trilby Taylor.

She lived in an apartment which was even more sophisticated than mine, all glass and terribly free-form. I phoned from the foyer and she told me I could come right up. By the time I found her place—the names were done in silver script—I was way ahead of the story. She'd be radiant and receptive. Pete would welcome and woo her. There would be an early fall wedding to which I would not be invited. Rather sullenly I rapped on her *avant-garde* door.

It opened, and just to prove that everything in life is not so cliché as it is in the movies, she was not what I had expected at all. You'd have imagined, from Pete's description, that she would be tall and slim, with tilted green eyes, silky and slinky and the whole bit. Well, believe me, that was not Miss Trilby Taylor. She was sort of pretty, the way lots of girls are sort of pretty—me, even. And she had a nice figure, but so have I. There was one big difference, though, and I sensed it right away. I hate even to use that silly word, but—well, she did glow. If you asked me why, I wouldn't be able to tell you. She just did, that's all. Like the first crocus, or the first spring rain.

"Come in," she said, and then she moved ahead of me into the apartment. Have you ever seen kids blow the puff off dandelion heads? It floats away in the air like snow in sunlight. That's how she crossed the room. "Sit down," she said, and the way she beckoned me into the chair made me feel that it was a throne. I watched her while she composed herself to listen. Her eyes widened and deepened with attention as flattering as the sound of applause.

"What can I do for you?" she asked. Her tone suggested that all I had to do was merely mention what I would like and she would command it to appear.

"Oh, nothing," I said eagerly, "but I've got something wonderful to tell you." And I told her.

"Well," she said, "can you beat that?" Like the shifting colors of the rainbow, she now took on a gravely modest air. "Gee," she said, "I'm floored." She looked at me helplessly, as if she were imploring me to guide her. I felt a surge of maternal warmth toward her.

"You will see him, won't you?"

She gave it some thought, and as she did, another chameleon change came over her. She was regal; commanding the attention of a courtier. "Yes," she said almost imperiously, "I'll see him."

"He's terribly nice," I added.

She smiled faintly, and that smile conjured numberless legions of nice men flinging away their lives for one moment with her. It was fascinating to watch. She was like a prism, catching every mood in her mobile face, in her slightest gesture, in the warmth of her voice.

"Well," I said at last, reluctant to tear myself away, "thank you very much."

The prism sparked and softened, and she was my confidante, girlish and confiding. "Is he married?"

"No."

"Isn't that cute?" she said, and a dimple flashed in her cheek. Like a lamb being led to the slaughter, I found myself thinking of ways and means to help her hook him. Suddenly I realized I had to get out of there.

"I have to go now," I said, "but I live right down the street at the Villa Leon, and if you could come to my house tomorrow night, I'll have Mr. Ronson there too."

"You were a darling to come and tell me about this," she said. I felt like the United States mail arriving against all odds. "It was a pleasure," I said, like a grateful simpleton, and with that I found myself outside the door. What's more, I leaned against it for a moment or two. It had been quite an experience. I'd seen

an ordinary, garden-variety girl cast a spell without benefit of make-up, lights, costume, bell, book or candle.

The next morning—after ten—I called Pete and told him the good tidings.

“Marvelous,” he said; “wonderful.” There was a slight pause. “She does, doesn’t she?” he asked, as if I would know what he meant. I did.

“She certainly does,” I replied.

“It gets you right here,” he said, and I could hear him thumping his chest over the telephone. “It’s a mystique. Like Garbo’s.”

“Yes,” I echoed unhappily.

“You’re a doll,” he chirruped. “See you tonight.”

The star-crossed meeting was scheduled to take place around eight o’clock. Around half past seven I gathered up my laundry in a tight little bundle. I planned to introduce them, disappear into the basement of the apartment house, put my quarter into the automatic washer and have a good cry. I’d just rounded up the washcloths when the bell rang. Before I even opened the door I caught the scent of heliotrope. I’m especially fond of heliotrope. The smell of it dissolved the mean little ball of spite which was knotting up my midriff. After all, it was a wonderful Cinderella story and I was almost happy to have played a part in it. Clinging to the thought, I let her in. Don’t ask me how she did it, but she managed to look as if someone had passed a magic wand over her. Instinctively I glanced over her shoulder, half expecting to find a coach and four.

“Is he here?” The way she breathed the words made a tryst of it—Juliet encountering Romeo.

“Any moment,” I said, wondering why I never looked that well in green. “Won’t you come in?”

She found just the right chair, the right light, the right way of making the room hers. Mournfully I slid under her spell.

“That’s a wonderful dress,” I said.

“I made it myself,” she confided.

Of course. It figured. She could probably cook, too, and keep her bank balance straight. She undoubtedly understood football and biochemistry; her dresser drawers were doubtless neat as a pin. I was sure she could teach a sparrow to speak, and grow ivy in the dark, and stay thin without dieting. All that was known to trolls, elves, sprites and fairies, she knew.

There was a knock at the door. It was Pete—Pete looking over my head to the vision behind me with a slow smile of satisfaction lighting his eyes. I introduced them, murmured something about excusing myself while they talked, hoisted my laundry like a homeless hobo and ducked out. The door had hardly closed behind me when I heard a spill of laughter, fresh and spontaneous, like a brook in spring. I fled.

It seemed to me that I was in the basement for hours and hours. I washed my wash. I hung my wash. I looked at other people's wash. All those damp clothes had a lugubrious effect on me. I'd never get the chance to hang wool socks or a man's undershirts next to my nylons. Slowly but surely I'd come to an unloved middle age. My father and mother would arrive from Pasadena, bringing me a cat for company; I'd begin to buy button-down-the-front sweaters and sensible shoes—life would be over.

I huddled miserably against the mangle. It wasn't fair. It's true that I might not remind a man of a water sprite, but I make wonderful fudge cake and I remember people's birthdays and I can knit, and clean a bathtub, and children adore me. What is more, I'm a good listener; I save money and I have a very placid disposition. Savagely I kicked the stationary tub. A fine lot of good it did me. By now she'd cast her spell, spun her web and lit up the sky. They would be arranging dinner dates, film tests, *Kaffeeklatches*. The bread was on the water, the genie was out of the bottle, and I was just plain *kaput*.

I wailed aloud and groped for a large wet hankie. I was really getting up a head of steam when I heard Pete shouting in the hall above me. Natural exuberance, I thought darkly;

wild elation. Then I realized that he was hollering for me. I emerged gloomily from the lower depths, my hands reddened, my eyes teary, my hair tousled.

"What do you want," I asked, "and where have you left Miss Taylor?"

He grabbed for my hands and whirled me wildly around. "Put her in her car just this minute!" he shouted. "She's great, great, great!"

"Could we please stop waltzing around?" I asked. "I'm getting rather dizzy."

"We ought to fly!" he yelled. "We've just brought Venus up from the sea!"

"You weren't disappointed, then?" I muttered.

"Disappointed? Listen. She's got a touch of Audrey Hepburn; there's a hint of Bergman; something of Lynn Fontanne when she was a girl. There's Trilby Taylor. Something new; something very, very old. Tremendous!"

"Well," I said dismally, "I'm sure I can speak for the Hollywood Branch Library as well as for myself. We're happy to have been of help."

"You've been sensational," he said. "Now comes the hard work, the right stories, the showcase productions, maybe something in Europe. I want good people to do her clothes, photograph her. She's got to be handled like a baby. My baby."

"She's a lovely girl personally," I said bravely. "She's honest and sincere and warmhearted and—"

He stared at me. I assumed he was enjoying the run-down, so I went on, "She's charming and gracious and modest—"

"You're full of beans," Pete said flatly.

"I beg your pardon?"

"Full of beans," he repeated obligingly.

I leaned against the wall for support. "But you said—" I spluttered. "You thought—"

"I said she was great. She is great. I said she had flair. She has. I mentioned, in passing, that she had an aura. Check. A glow. Double check. There was no talk of honesty, sincerity or mod-

esty. Of these virtues, my pet, she has none. She doesn't have to possess virtues. She isn't a mere mortal, a single female. She's a phenomenon—a *parade!*"

"But weren't you—didn't you—Wasn't there some personal feeling in all this?" I quavered.

"A *soupçon*, perhaps," he said, "but let me add that while the thought might have crossed my mind, the minute we talked I scratched the whole idea."

I contemplated my shoe tops. "Would you mind telling me why?"

"Well, for one thing she has a fella."

"How do you know?"

"Because she told me so in the same breath that she announced she'd dump him if he got inconvenient. You're wincing."

"Well—"

"Don't wince. Always look for the clay feet. With her, everything is a prop, a tool, an effect. Terrific from a loge seat—murder at close quarters."

"Oh," I said. "Oh."

He smiled faintly. "Now me," he went on, "I like a girl who keeps cold chicken in her icebox—the type who bawls in movies."

"You do?" I asked tremulously.

"It's a funny, pushing kind of a world," he said seriously. "Rough. Hectic. People put out their hands more to shove than to help. It's been a month of Sundays since I've seen anyone like you. I bet you remember people's birthdays. I bet kids are crazy about you."

"Please," I said, close to tears, "I'm not what you think I am at all. I'm envious and petty and small-minded."

His gaze was gentle. "I think you're a pretty good egg," he said. "You worked like a dog for someone else to get lucky—you even put up with me."

I crushed my hankie and longed for the courage to speak up. "That wasn't hard," I offered timidly.

"I'm very glad to hear it," he said, and right then and there he tilted up my face—my nose still red from all that self-pity—and kissed me. It was even more personal than the thank-you note I had from Kirk Douglas. And it did something wonderful—something transforming. Over Pete's shoulder I could see the large mirror which hangs in the hall, and in it a lovely reflection—the unmistakable and soul-satisfying sight of a girl with a glow.

SUMMERTIME ADVENTURE

By DAVID WALKER

GEORDIE MACTAGGART had to sit quiet for twenty minutes after his supper. It was a rule. Time dragged along like a tortoise this August evening, and he was just thinking after fifteen that he might slide off safely now, when his mother came out and sat beside him. She was no featherweight, and the bench creaked.

"What's on your mind, my wee warrior?"

Geordie grunted. He knew from the look on her face that she knew from his face he had been up to something. There were no flies on mum. "Here's dad now," she said, which was lucky.

Geordie's father was keeper and stalker at Drumfechan, and Friday was his evening for seeing the laird. He whistled a tune as he came back through the wood. It was a pipe tune called The Barren Rocks of Aden. Well, he wouldn't be whistling a lively march if there was trouble in his mind.

A good sign, Geordie hoped; but he was not so sure when dad said, "The laird's wantin' Geordie."

"The laird—what for does the laird want our Geordie?"

Dad shrugged his big shoulders in his best knickerbocker suit. "Don't ask me. I was just coming away when he says, 'George in residence this evenin'?' So I says, 'Ay.' And he says, 'Ask the dear

boy to spare me a minute of his invaluable time. Wanta discuss the state of Denmark.’” Dad could do a good copy of the laird’s talk. So could Geordie, only he wasn’t allowed to.

“Was you and the laird talking about Denmark, Geordie?”

“No,” Geordie said. “One time I seen the laird he asked what jography we was doing in the school, but I says Canada.”

“Och, well,” said mum. “It’ll be the laird wantin’ a chat with his pal, or it’ll mebbe just be some daft notion.”

“Now, now.” Dad meant less of that about the laird’s daft notions in front of Geordie—as if everybody didn’t know the laird was daft.

“Come ben the house,” mum said, “and we’ll get you dressed respectable.”

So, in a few minutes, Geordie was wearing a necktie and clean boots and his green-and-brown jacket made out of dad’s old Drumfechan tweed.

“Mind you say ‘Sir,’” called dad from the supper table.

Geordie knocked on the kitchen door at the big house. “Come in,” said Mistress Robertson, who was cook. “Oh, it’s you,” she said. There was bad feeling between Geordie and Mistress Robertson on account of a water booby trap he set for her on the coal-shed door last week. It worked lovely.

“The laird’s wantin’ me,” Geordie said.

Mistress Robertson sniffed and went away and came back. “The laird will see you,” she said, very stuck-up.

The laird of Drumfechan was looking out of the study window when Geordie went in. He had his droopy kilt on, faded to the color of old rope. He was a very tall, scraggy man with wide mustaches.

“Hullo, George,” he said, and this side of his mustaches wagged.

“Hullo, sir,” said Geordie, wondering what about Denmark, or what.

“Damned envious witch—I should have said bitch,” the laird was muttering to himself. “Tut-tut, man! Watch your language.” He turned round. “Bit of trouble, George. Fact is, old What’s-er-

name's been complaining about you by telephone. Says Reid caught you poaching the Reekie. True or false?"

Old What's-er-name was the laird of Drumfechan's neighbor and arch-enemy. He hardly ever called her by her right name, which was Miss McIlreekie of McIlreekie.

"I didn't even have the rod up," Geordie said. "I was just taking a wee walk and a look about."

"Admiring the scenery, doubtless. Well, George, I didn't like to mention it to your father, knowing his somewhat old-fashioned views in the matter of *trespass et cetera*. Did Reid ambush you?"

"Yes," Geordie said. "I thocht he was away up the hill this forenoon and he wasn't."

The laird gave a huge laugh. "What did he say?"

"He said, 'Next time I'll cut out yer liver 'n' lights,'" Geordie quoted.

"What? He said that? Horrible fat lowland feller. I never did like him." The laird's face went darker red, almost purple, which was a sign he was vexed. "Mark my words, George, if he does that to you, I'll—I'll disembowel the rascal—yes, personally degizzard him with relish. Dreadful thing to say to a boy." Mumble, mumble. The laird cooled off. "Anything worth seeing?"

"There's a muckle trout in the Black Pool. It's a whopper."

"How big, boy—how big?" cried the laird.

Geordie showed the size with his hands.

"Oh, I say, a veritable behemoth!" But the laird sighed. He stood for a long time, looking out the window again, quiet, as if he was thinking. "Remarkable coincidence, George, y'know," he said finally, "but when I was a boy—about twelve would I have been; yes, your own age—I caught a monster in that selfsame pool—five pounds two ounces."

"The laird would have had permission?"

"Permission? Not on your lifel I caught it sub rosa with my own skill and subterfuge by honorable poaching means. Know what I caught it on, George?"

Geordie shook his head.

"Wasp maggots," hissed the laird. "Best bait in Christendom." He bent down over Geordie like some whiskery old stork bird. "Dropped a few in as ground bait to whet his appetite. Then gave him my offering with supreme delicacy and skill. Wham, gazeeka, he took it! Ever use wasp maggots, George?"

"Whiles," said Geordie. "They're kind of ticklish to get, though."

"Oh, not too bad. A veil, a puff of smoke, a spade and, owl, beside me stinging in the wilderness." He was very daft this evening. "Use my bee things any time. You know where they are, dear boy—by the hives."

"Thanks," said Geordie.

"Now, George," the laird said in a different voice altogether. He could be fierce. "I sent for you to administer a rebuke. My relations with Miss What's-er-name are abominable enough already, without George MacTaggart adding fuel to the fire. I will not tolerate poaching habits. Understand?" He glared at Geordie, puffing out his narrow cheeks and wide mustaches.

"Yes, sir," said Geordie.

"We have trout of our own in plenty. Not monsters, I admit, but self-respecting fish any ordinary feller would be proud to catch. I mean we can't all break records, can we, George? That's what records are for, eh, George?"

"Yes, sir . . . no, sir." The laird's machine-gun talk always got Geordie muddled. But under being muddled he was looking at the toes of his good boots and he was thinking, *Five pounds two ounces. I bet this yin's bigger.* And he was thinking, *Twelve years of age the laird says he was.* Geordie tried to make a picture of the laird when he was twelve, but he couldn't; he just couldn't imagine it somehow.

"I say, George!" The laird stared down at him, frowning. "Haven't been too severe, have I? Didn't upset you?"

"Och, no," said Geordie. "I was just thinking."

The laird gave a huge laugh again. "Well, keep out of trouble, and don't be downhearted about that trout. This other Eden,

demiparadise, where hangs a monster apple, where hangs out a venomous Eve. Off you go, old feller."

He waited at the window. Sure enough, Geordie appeared, moving at a brisk trot in the direction of the beehives, looking neither to right nor left. The laird watched his friend with admiration. "Such terrifying fixity of purpose," he said aloud, as was his solitary wont. "Small of stature, but mighty of heart. Big things will come of that boy yet." Then the laird felt guilty. "What an old scoundrel I am," he muttered. "But what a trout it was."

The wasps' bike was in a hole in the ground. "You do the smokin'," Geordie commanded. "I'll do the diggin'."

So he dug, and Jean Donaldson, who was the gardener's daughter, she puffed smoke out of the bee smoker to make the wasps dopey. They had veils on, and gloves, and two pairs of their fathers' long underwear over everything. The trouble wasn't the wasps inside. The trouble was late travelers returning in the gloaming and not liking the idea of their home being dug up. Geordie and Jean had not been able to wait for dark because of bedtime.

So he dug fast. Jean gave a yelp whenever she was stung through her double underwear. Geordie grunted at the first one; then he just clenched his teeth and dug like a sweaty demon in extra clothes and veil until he reached two big slabs of the light, spongy, wafery combs. "Come away then!" And they ran for safety in an angry wasp buzz. They ran until there were no wasps left except the ones crawling on them.

"Aa-ow-ow!" cried Jean with a shudder and shake, and she burst into tears.

"Here, let's take a look at ye," Geordie said. He found three at her legs and several on her veil. "Greetin'!" he said sternly. "What's there to greet about in a wasp sting?"

"It wasn't a wasp sting, it was five, and ilka one like a red-hot knife stuck into me."

"Five! I've ten."

"I knew fine, perfect wee Geordie would have twice as mony." But she searched him for wasps as well as she was able in the half-light, and only snuffled a few times to show she had been crying.

"It was nine I had," he confessed on the way home, unveiled. "Not ten. How's yours, Jean?"

"Just throbbing. How's yours?"

"So, so. Ammonia, that's the stuff to sort them. Mum has it in the kitchen. Does yours?"

"Och ay," she said, and paused. "What for was the hurry to get wasp maggots, Geordie?"

Jean was only eleven and a lassie, so he didn't let her into everything. But he was thinking now that he might be needing Jean's help, so he said, "It's special. I'll tell you the morn's morn." Then he thought: *Yes, I'll need her.* He said, "There's not many lassies would keep on smokin' and gettin' stung the way you done."

"Och, away," she said, meaning "nonsense," but all buttered up and pleased as Punch.

Geordie was out and up the hill by seven next morning. He found a place in deep old heather and lay there till he saw what he hoped to see. Then he hurried home with a rare big appetite to sup his porridge.

"What are you after doing the day?" mum asked as per usual every morning of the summer holidays.

"I'm not just sure yet," Geordie answered as per usual. He was pretty sure, though.

He split some kindling for her; then he got away. You never knew where the laird mightn't pop up unexpected—inspecting his trees, or watching some bird, or just mooching, as he called it. It was important not to be seen by the laird this morning. So Geordie took the Secret Path which he had made himself through the darkest woods. It was the kind of path you were a

Red Indian flitting like a shadow along it and expecting other Red Indians in war paint at every corner.

When he was below Jean's house, he made the quiet whistle. It was the call of the bullfinch—two plain deep notes, but louder than a real bullfinch with his bonny red chest and his cocky black head.

Jean came. "What's on, Geordie?" she whispered in the whis-
perty place.

He told her.

"But you can't, Geordie! Not after Beefy Reid catchin' you yesterday, and the laird saying you wasn't to poach. Och, Geordie!" Jean was a year younger and two inches taller, so she looked down at him, sort of worried and excited, too, because Geordie might be smaller, but he was the boss.

"Five pounds two ounces was the fish the laird took when the laird was twelve. I'll bet a million billion trillion quadrillion this yin's bigger." Geordie was the kind of person who, once he gets an idea into his head, it grows and grows, and he can think of nothing but "five pounds two ounces" until he tries to do whatever it may be. "Besides," he continued, "I saw Beefy away up the hill early. So Auld Beaky's the only one we're needing to watch out for." Geordie gave Jean a look. "I'll go on my lone-
some," he remarked. "I'm no wantin' skeery lassies."

"Who says I'm skeery?" She had her hands on her hips, and she swayed from side to side, and her face was as red as the bull-
finch.

"Keep yer hair on."

They moved up the low woods of the glen. The path was close above the road. They had not gone far when who should come purring along in her Rolls-Royce 1926 limousine, swish-
swish, the old black gleaming box on wheels, with the chauffeur in front and herself behind like the Queen of England, but Auld Beaky McIlreekie. In the pictures you saw, the queen waved at people. Not so Auld Beaky. She just stared over her great bony nose as if nobody else existed. Come to think of it, if you had a nose like that between your eyes to look past, it would be hard

ever to forget it enough even to notice other folk. Auld Beaky was a holy terror. Everyone at Drumfechan agreed about that.

"Good riddance," Geordie said.

"Ta-ta, my bonny Beaky darlin'," Jean sang.

They both felt better as they came to the Reekie. Downstream—except for one disputed stretch—Miss McIlreekie owned the left bank and the laird owned the right bank. But here the Reekie climbed fair and square into McIlreekie land—or ran down out of it, whichever way. High up the hill it was a burn; lower it was a river; here it was not big enough to be a real river and not small enough to be a real burn, so it was never called either. It was called the Reekie.

They looked about them. Nobody was in sight. Geordie and Jean climbed the eight-foot fence, less of a fence to hold red deer than a sign that the laird and Auld Beaky were mortal enemies.

They crept up through rhododendrons beside the bonny Reekie. It was the kind of stream that you could dream about and never be lucky enough to find unless you were Geordie and Jean off poaching on a summer morning. Loud water and quiet water and dark water and white water. The wagtail flounced his long, long tail, and flashed yellow to another wet black rock. Rabbits chased one another hoppity-hop up there outside their sandy burrows. Sunshine brightened this to darken that. Oh, the merry Reekie. Peaceful, too, for law-abiding folk.

They lay on their stomachs at the Black Pool. Nothing moved. The water was clear but peaty-dark, except in just one place where a sun shaft struck slantwise to a boulder six foot below the surface.

"Under the ledge," Geordie whispered. "Yonder's where he lies."

"I canna see him." Doubting Jean.

"There!" A stubby torpedo, lazily forward, two flicks of the tail, sink back.

"Oh-h! He's huge! He's the hugest I ever seen!"

The brown trout—it could not be a salmon here above the falls of Reekie—was even bigger than Geordie had thought yesterday.

He undid the rod cover, had his old rod up in a jiffy and the reel on, and was threading the line when he thought of what he should have thought of sooner.

"See yon tree?" A big one high on the bank. "Climb it. Watch up the way and down the way. If anybody comes, blow the loud whistle. Keep yer eyes skinned."

"Beefy's up the hill. Auld Beaky's away into toon. Nobody else would come. What's the need?"

"Do as I tell ye."

Jean grumbled off to do his bidding up the tree.

"Ground bait," the laird had said. So Geordie opened the tin and broke a bit off the comb and extracted maggots carefully. He lay down again with his eye peeking round a rock. Ground bait could be a help, but it wasn't nearly so important as not being seen. He threw one in and watched the whiteness dim as it sank. Too far upstream. He threw another. Too low. It took him five to get the right spot. The fifth maggot slanted down with the lazy current, going, going, nearly gone—and there it was, white again in the one shaft of sun. "Wham!" as the laird had said. Good-by, maggot.

Geordie MacTaggart fed that trout. He fed that trout just enough to make it ravenous for excellent wasp maggots. Quick now!

He found the very best ones—still white, but come to the legs and shape of a wasp. They were such soft lifeless things you could hardly imagine them as stingers in a day or two if they had been luckier. They were a grand bait with a bad disadvantage—so tender that the least thing tore them off the hook.

Geordie fixed them in a lovely white bunch right round and up the shaft. He put on a small sinker. He let bait and sinker and gut gently into the water. Not enough weight. Another sinker.

He knew that the best chance of getting this cunning old trout was that the bait should come not too high and not too low right to his nose the very first time. Geordie was not much of a fly fisherman yet, but he was as good a bait-using boy of twelve as you could find in Scotland or England or America or Canada or any trout country. *Five pounds two ounces*, he was saying to himself as the giant of the Reekie gobbled his hook.

It sounds easy, but it wasn't. It sounds lucky, and it was. Geordie had so many things to do in the next twenty minutes that he did not have time to be thinking how clever he was or lucky. The trout was far too big for his light tackle. The line screamed up and the line screamed down. Was he running out of the pool? No, back again. Reel in like lightning, get back what you can. Easy on him. There he goes again. Watch that snag! Watch it!

"He's getting tired the now," came Jean's light voice from up the tree.

"Dinna look at me!" Geordie shouted as loud as he was able, panting, his arms like red-hot ton weights. The trout had dashed the first dash out of itself. It rested now across the Reekie, waiting.

The loud whistle, the piercing alarm Geordie had taught Jean to blow, fingers behind teeth; then Jean's voice again, "Auld Beaky's comin' doon yonder bank wi' yon wee bitch!"

Excellent clear message. Terrible news of Beaky back from town. Where? Where? One place only—between those two rocks below. And the rod? Sink it, reel and all.

Geordie lay in shallow water hidden by the rocks, arms stretched forward and down, rod pointed to the depths. What happened when you played a fish the wrong way round, from down below to up above? What about these queer submarine tugs and trembles?

Now he could hear Auld Beaky's footsteps. "Sheenal" she called, hoity-toity like the laird's voice, but it was the Holy Terror's. "Come he-ah to heel, you naughty little bunny-chasing thing, at once!"

Geordie hung on like grim death, feeling a change in what was happening topsy-turvy underwater. What happened at the surface was a loud splash. Then Sheena, the West Highland terrier, the wee bitch, yapped her head off. "A brown trout jumping like a salmon, and at such an unnatural angle! Now stop it, Sheena! I will not have you swimming after trout much larger than yourself." Mumble-mumble. "I don't wonder that wretched MacTaggart boy came poaching." Mumble. "Called me an envious witch. I'll teach the gangling fool." Good-by, Auld Beaky.

Half an hour later, Geordie stranded the trout in shallows, and faithful Jean, summoned from her treetop, lay upon it while he found the right kind of stone to hit a monster on the head.

They retired into rhododendrons, where he took down his rod. He was pretty well tired out, but he was strong for his limited size, with good big lungs, and in a few minutes he felt better. They were wet, but it was warm.

They stole down beside the bonny Reekie, from bush to bush, from pool to pool, from tree to tree, from riffle to riffle—careful, silent, successful poachers. No sign of Auld Beaky McIlreekie. They scaled the fence.

"Och, Geordie!" said Jean in the friendly woods. "Yon was braw!"

"You did fine," Geordie said, giving well-earned praise. He held up his trout for a good look. With the big head it wasn't perhaps a very bonny trout, but it was the bonniest, hugest trout he had ever seen.

"What's to be done with it?" Jean was usually the one who thought of things first. "You can't take it home, can ye?"

"No," he said. "I can't." Dad knew the size of the tiddlers in the hill burn. And he knew there were no big ones in the lower Reekie. Dad and Mr. Beefy Reid were not excellent pals by any means, everybody being mixed up in the bad blood, so to speak. But dad's ideas about poaching were something else again.

"Could ye sell it?"

"I'm not wantin' for to sell it." Here he had caught mebbe the

biggest trout in all Scotland, and he couldn't even take it home. That was a bad feeling to have.

"There's just the one thing we can do."

"What's that?"

"We'll make a fire and fry it up and eat it to wer dinner. That's what, Geordie."

"We couldn't. We couldn't manage a trout yon size."

"Two feasts, then, we can have."

"What am I to say, though? Mum expects me." Geordie had done a lot this morning. Perhaps he had done the biggest thing in all his life, and he didn't have many ideas left in him.

"Just say, 'I'm having my dinner up Jean's way.' And I'll say, 'I'm having my dinner down Geordie's way.' And that'll be the truth, sort of. Now mind you say it right. Can you get bread, Geordie?"

"I'll try," he said, a bit bamboozled by this gafuffle. He looked at the trout, and he looked at it, and he looked at it.

"I'll get butter and a pan. Meet you at the island."

The island was one of the chief causes of, and excuses for, hostilities between Drumfechan and McIlreekie. Right bank yours, left bank mine, had been the immemorial rule. But one spring spate in ancient rumored time, the Reekie changed its course, making a savage loop into Drumfechan land. Then, in slightly less distant, but dimly recorded days, the Reekie changed back to the *status quo ante*. Some springs ago it had sought an unhappy mean and forked, making a true but troublous island.

Litigation founded in expense. The laird built a footbridge over the right channel; Miss McIlreekie built one over the left—symbols of ownership. But they avoided the place, a mere sight being enough to stir up passion. Only in times of burning acrimony did their several walks take them past the island. Mostly it was left to pigeons, pheasants, rabbits and mallard. Hence the wooded island was an excellent place for the more private occasions of Geordie and Jean.

He put hook into gills and waited for the pointer to steady. "Seven pounds six ounces," he said. What a feeling that was.

"Seven pounds six and a wee tiny bit," said Jean. "Clean it then, Geordie," she added, keen to be at the cooking.

So Geordie cleaned his famous fish, which had two small trout as well as wasp maggots in its belly. "We'll eat the tail half first," he said, rightfully his decision. *That's that*, he thought quite sadly, chopping through with his sharp knife and sliding the longer half into the pan; and he said, "It's great catching a muckle fish, but then it's not there to catch again. And once it's eaten, then it's eaten. See what I mean, Jean?"

"Ay," she said, turning it with his knife a first time in the melted butter. "I see what you mean, Geordie."

They had a fire of dry sticks, so there was hardly any smoke and lots of heat, and it began to frizzle and sizzle and smell just lovely. "Are you hungry, Jean?"

"I wasn't," she said. "Now I am."

"Me too," Geordie said. "I'm fair watering at the mouth."

Ready. Jean eased the top bit off the backbone and divided it in two, and then they were eating browned, buttery fried trout on bread and butter. Their own trout.

A pigeon coo-cooed from an island tree. The sun shone in on them down here. Nobody to say, "Don't talk with your mouth full."

"Was thinkin'," said Jean, with hers. "Jes thinkin' what laird'd've bin like when laird's twelve. Couldn't."

"Same here," said Geordie. "And it's two pounds four ounces bigger than the laird's trout was when the laird was twelve. I'd've liked fine for the laird to see it." A cloud the size of a man's hand over the perfection of this island dinner. The uncooked half lay in a shady place on moss. The second-half of the cooked half was in their hands on home-baked bread and home-churned butter.

"Auld Beaky's the one who should have seen it," Jean said. "What say we wrap the head up in tissue paper and put it in a box in another box in another box in another box and thick

string with a hundred knots and post it to Auld Beaky McIlreekie?"

They were considering this brilliant inspiration of Jean's when yaps sounded from McIlreekie side, and an even worse sound—splashings. "It's yon wee bitch."

Still worse—splashings also from Drumfechan.

"Sheena, you little scamp, come back!"

"Heel, Buster, hellhound! Heel, sir!"

The laird's Labrador had longer legs. He arrived first at the source of that delicious smell, wafted hither and yonder by the fitful airs of an August day. Sheena came a moment later.

They tried shooing them and they tried hushing them, while the owners shouted. It was terrible. The only hope seemed to be feed them. Jean was feeding trout to Buster, and Geordie was feeding trout to Sheena when footsteps sounded on both bridges. The laird of Drumfechan and Miss McIlreekie arrived at either side of the clearing. There had not even been time to hide the half with the fine big head on it.

The laird stared. Auld Beaky stared. Buster and Sheena asked for more. Geordie and Jean stood slowly up, bread in hand.

"Well, I'll be——"

"Merciful heavens!"

Then the extraordinary thing happened. The laird started cackling his huge laugh. Auld Beaky's tweeds began to shake all over. And there they were in a minute with the tears of laughter pouring down their cheeks.

"We got it," mumbled Geordie guiltily with pride.

"How heavy, George?"

"Seven pounds six ounces," he said. "Jean's witness."

"Seven pounds six and a wee tiny bit," Jean stated.

"I saw an enormous trout jump most peculiarly as I came down the Reekie," mused Auld Beaky. She didn't seem quite such a holy terror at the moment.

"Jean was sentry up a tree," Geordie explained, "and I was hooked into it from underneath."

They thought that funny too.

"A fishy feast indeed," said the laird of Drumfechan. "You'd better cook the rest and eat it. We'll watch."

"I couldn't," Geordie said. "I'm full to the back teeth."

"Me too," said Jean.

"Would the laird and Aul—and Miss McIlreekie mebbe like a wee taste if we fried it up?" he offered politely.

"Not fried, dear boy; I simply daren't."

"Nor I, thank you so much, George."

"You could take it home and boil it if you wanted." It was her fish in a manner of speaking.

"Would you like to share—" began Miss McIlreekie, and stopped.

"That's exceedingly kind—" began the laird, and stopped.

They looked at each other for a minute as if they mightn't be such natural deadly enemies after all. Then they both gave a sort of shake to their heads and coughed and looked away.

"No intended rudeness, George," said Auld Beaky briskly. "But these cannibal trout aren't particularly good."

"It tasted just fine," Geordie and Jean protested together.

"Of course it did," said the laird. "Cannibals eat nice little trout, don't they? Ergo!"

"If you ate Geordie and Jean would you be any the less stringy?"

"Perfectly revolting remark." The laird turned angrily on his heel. But he turned back. "Stringy yourself," he said. "Female Cassius, lean and hungry. Let me have hags about me that are fat."

They disappeared in opposite directions with leashed dogs.

"I was thinking, Jean," said Geordie later. "One minute there I thought the laird and her was quite pally with one another; then they kind of shook themselves and the next minute at it hammer and tongs in double-dutch again. Queer, eh?"

"Would it mebbe be like what you said about catching the trout, Geordie? Once they'd stopped the squabbles, then they

wouldn't have the squabbles for to think about and keep them happy. Would that be it?"

"Could be," Geordie said. "Grownups is all daft."

"Ay," said Jean, "and they're the daftest."

So that was the best day Geordie and Jean ever had when she was eleven and he was twelve.

YOUNG MAN ON HIS OWN

By CHARLES RAWLINGS

THE HURRICANE was surely coming, the radio said. It was moving very fast and would cross the coast at Nantucket Shoals and be into Maine by dark. It would have increasing winds up to ninety miles an hour, accompanied by very heavy rain.

The boy slipped out of the living room where the radio was and ran across the barnyard in the rain. He slid one of the doors of the leaning old barn and squeezed inside. Angled down the middle of the big building, a jury rig had been strung. It was a length of chain well up on the barn's mid-post and a twofold block and fall hooked into a rusty ringbolt that had been set long ago into a flat outcrop of rock ledge on the barn's far side. The rope in the blocks was new hemp that shone out white and stark in the gloom. Digging in his heels, the boy lay back on the fall, the pulling end of the tackle, with all his small boy's strength. He accomplished nothing, barely swaying the slack that sagged in the chain leading aloft. Whimpering at his failure, he ran into the middle of the big empty building.

"Wait until my father comes!" he cried up into its height.
"Don't blow down!"

His boy's voice was a shrill supplication in the emptiness. The

barn, with its high open middle space like a nave, might have been an old cobweb-festooned cathedral brooding in its dusk and memories. Its framing had a Gothic loft and grace. The rooftree, the principal rafters, the posts and studs were all single sticks.

To gauge them was to marvel that trees had ever grown that tall and straight, so free of knot or flaw. They had been squared out of the round by broadax. That hewing was the work of master craftsmen. The edges were as straight as any saw could cut. The sharp round-honed axes had left saucer-shaped ripples in the wood that gave it a cast of brown, watered silk, and it had a polished sheen where cattle and man had rubbed for all its years. Generations of pioneer farmers had used it as the one essential institution of their hard-working, vital American lives. A parade of the yokes of oxen, the horse teams, the milk cows that had sheltered and fed and given birth and died in it would circle the moonlit, ghostly track at county fair. Now, with a pitiful, aged lean southeastward where something had dry-rotted or settled; with chinks of the darkening sky showing through its shingled roof, and all its faithful usefulness forgotten and past, it was waiting for the hurricane. Only the boy cared anything at all about it now.

It belonged to his father. He was an editor who had come down Maine from New Jersey, following the trend of the well-to-do away from cities and crowded living in this noisy, overtaxed atomic age. He had bought the old farm as a place to which to retire and write as soon as his editorship was done, which he hoped would be within another year. Still working in New York, he had moved into the Maine place as soon as it was ready, and joined his family on weekends when he could. He had spent a great deal of money modernizing the two-story, nine-window-front house and the ell, but he had been advised to tear down the old barn.

"I'll have nought to do with that old barn," Hiram Bisbee, his contractor, had warned him in the very beginning. "'T aint wuth it. She's sagged out of plumb. Got a bad cant to her. What does

a writer—a city feller—want with an old cattle barn anyway? Tear her down when you get around to it and build yourself a nice gayrawge.

Known after that as "Old 'T aint," the barn awaited its doom. The boy had been given the task of getting it ready. He was a fourteen-year-old, lonely, city kid; a transfer from No. 29 Grammar School, of Montclair, New Jersey, to the Village School at Jefferson Town, a ten-minute ride in the yellow school bus from his new home. He was very well-mannered and well-spoken, and he had had a rugged time at first in his new school. He had weathered it behind quietness and loneliness. He came into summer vacation and did a great deal of solitary worm fishing, and then, still quiet and shy, he had found a job in a neighborhood haying crew, driving team. By early fall he had acquired two inches of growth, a flock of freckles under bleached tow hair, and strong, never-clean, country boy's hands. His father, drawn and white from the city heat and the hard drive down east, beckoned to him the last Sunday in August.

"Roberto," he had said, "Old 'T aint out there is worrying me. All that hay and trash is a fire hazard in this dry weather. It's got to be cleaned up, even though we are pulling the old thing down. Start at the front and rake it out back and get it in a pile. What say?"

"Aw, sir," the boy pleaded, "don't tear it down. Old 'T aint is, too, wuth it. We're going to need that barn when you get up here every day. No State-o'-Mainer ever lost his barn that he didn't cry harder than if he lost his house. We're State-o'-Mainers, sir."

"I know," his father said. "That haying crew of yours was a heavy course in philosophy. But I say Old 'T aint is an old wreck, and that's that. I don't like the way it leans over the ell. We'll have something. A smaller place, with a woodworking shop and maybe a small greenhouse. You get that trash cleaned up. I'll pay ten bucks for a good clean job."

The old barn, basking in the fine August weather, was waiting for the boy. It knew the breed. Since the barn's first boy who

had worn homespun breeches and homemade buckled shoon, the job of cleaning barn became a game of finders keepers—a treasure hunt.

He started in the stable—the tie-up, as it is called in Maine. His rake gathering up old bedding rang on what proved to be his best horseshoe. It was as big as a dinner plate. It had worn-down ice calks on the toe and heel. He named the horse Bob's Giant, and gave him the big box stall at the end of the long row of empty stalls, and nailed his shoe above the gate. After he had swept the floor, he whetted his scythe, that he had taken in lieu of money for his haying time, and mowed two swaths down a rich stand of clover behind the barn. The next day, when it had been made into the best kind of hay by the hot August sun and wind, he filled Giant's manger and gave him a thick bedding of it, so he could picture him powerful and contented there when he lay awake in his own bed in the fancy house.

He found a shed cow's horn. Then the twenty cow stalls, with their rusty tie-up chains still hanging on the stanchions, housed his fine Jersey herd. The empty place switched with their busy tails, lined up as true as a regiment. It was easy to inhabit the still, empty place. It had known so much of life for so long that its ghosts were crowded there.

His job took him out into mid-barn. On the far side, his rake scraped on the smooth rock ledge, and there was a heavy ring-bolt set into the stone. He knew pirates set such bolts in rock at the heads of secret coves, for heaving down ship and cleaning off barnacles so they could sail fast and smooth, but what this one was for in his barn he did not know. It was a fine heavy ring that pealed like a bell when it hit the rock ledge, and he tossed it back and forth, knocking off its rust. It was for heaving down something, a strong purchase that could not fail.

Close together, he found three white china eggs. His rake caught in an old rope, and when he pulled on it, it trailed away into the hay and tugged on something heavy. He pulled harder and dragged out a block and tackle. Fine one. The blocks were

double-sheaved with heavy, blacksmith-made, swiveled hooks and bottom rings. The metal was hardly rusted at all, although the rope was soft and rotted. He unreeved the rope and measured it off by paces twice to make sure it was thirty-five strides, one hundred feet long. He oiled the sheaves and they spun true on their bearings. It was a man-sized treasure. He drove two nails into the tie-up wall and hung the two blocks on them and coiled a logging chain he had found. The chain coil made a harsh nest for the china eggs. It was a fine sight across from Giant's stall.

Then, in one of the mows, hidden deep in a drift of old clover hay that still smelled sweet of some long-forgotten July, he found a fine, ten-gallon, glazed crock. Buried within it under a foot of chaff and dust were an inch-thick wooden plate and a smooth black rock. The wooden plate was as light as cork. Powder-post beetles had riddled it with their tiny round borings. He added the heavy crock to his treasure-trove.

The blocks were the great loot as he squatted and studied them. They were too good a secret to keep. He had to talk to someone about them. His mother and father were in New York, and Mrs. Hodgkins, the housekeeper, would be no good. He stuffed the china eggs into his pocket and, lugging the blocks, one in each hand, he went down the road to Ned Weeks' place.

Ned was teaming out logs for the portable mill cutting white pine on the Huzzy lot. He lived at the mill site in a tar-paper shack, beside his black team of Percherons and his brown Jersey cow, Betsy. When Old Tompkins, the regular school-bus driver, was ill in midwinter, Ned had been the substitute, and the kids were sorry when the sickness ended and Ned's songs and yarns that made the journey short were gone.

Ned was sitting in his chair, made from a cut-away wooden barrel with a hay-stuffed feed bag for a soft cushion, peeling his supper potatoes.

His lean Yankee face, that looked something like Uncle Sam's, winked one eye and smiled and said, "Robert, come in."

The boy fished in his pocket and held out the china eggs. Ned polished them on his pants and regarded the pair of blocks as the boy lowered them to the floor.

"Been cleanin' barn," Ned said. "I can see that. Been findin' things. Regular Robinson Crusoe. What you got to trade?"

"Trade, sir?"

"That's right. Cleanin' barn! Find a sight of things you forgot you had. Don't need 'em now. So you say, 'Ca'late I'd better trade.' That's a fine pair of blocks there."

Ned reached for one and spun the sheaves and tried the wooden side piece with a horny thumbnail.

"Ship block!" he said. "This's lignumvitae wood. No worm nor bug can wrastle his way into this. There's a pair of blocks worth money."

"There was a wooden plate in a crock, and the worms were into that," the boy said. "There was a rock in the crock too. What was that for, sir?"

"A wooden plate and a crock and a rock! No doubt at all what that is. That's a sauerkraut-makin' setup. How tall's the crock?"

The boy held his hand.

"No chips or cracks?" Ned said. "Sure now? Well, that's a coincidence. I was thinkin' about a good crock just the other day. It's a fine cabbage year and I ca'late to set me a batch of kraut."

Ned spun the block sheave and cocked one eye.

"It also just happens I got a hundred feet of brand-new inch hemp rope. Just the trick to rig these blocks of yours. It's company rope, but I inherited it."

His buff-colored, dusty eyebrows lowered and he seemed to be squinting over them down a rifle barrel of absolute intent interrogation, straight at the boy.

"Wanta trade? Even, that is? Nawthin' to boot?"

"Yes, sir."

"That's the way I like business. Trade it is."

His long, angular legs heaved him out of the chair and out the door, seemingly in one swift motion. The boy waited, listen-

ing. He heard the stable door open, and then Ned's low voice talking to his animals, and the clump of a heavy hoof as one of the horses stirred in response. It was a sound, that clump, his city boy's ears had heard for the first time this summer in the haying. More than any of the other new sounds he had learned, even more than the whippoorwill's cry, or the owl's shrill, or the boom of pond ice talking far off on still, zero night, the hoof clump sound made him tremble. It was a warm sound, deep and good. It was feed and rest and safety and strength, all together in a sound. Then the stable door slammed again and Ned came back with a coil of shining golden rope in his arms. He dumped it on the floor.

"You know how to splice an eye? Serve a rope end?" he said.

"No, sir."

"Well, watch here and I'llarn. Hand me that kit bag."

A ball of twine and a knob of beeswax came from the canvas bag. The twine creaked through the beeswax twice and then round and round the raw end of the clean, fine rope.

"Your father'll be glad you got this ta-a-ackle," Ned said. "This will be mighty useful when you get cleanin' up after you pull down your barn. You can veer and haul those big timbers with this. Once they get crashed down to the ground, that is. You know how a ta-a-ackle works, don't you?"

The boy was swallowing, clamping back on the terrible picture of the barn crashed and flat, but he nodded his head.

"One hoss pullin' here," Ned said, "is the same as four hosses pullin' here. This is double two-way ta-a-ackle. Two two-ways is four. So it's four times the power. Sim'lar to that Sir Galahad in the poem you kids were sayin' like magpies. How did that go? 'My strength is as the strength of ten, because my heart is pure.' That must have been block-and-ta-a-ackle work."

Ned parted the lays of the golden rope and started his eye splice around the upper block's ring. His fingers made the hemp squeak as he parted and tucked through and pulled tight.

"You know," he said, "in a way, it's a pity about that barn. Plenty of men in this country been workin' all their lives and

never got a barn as good as that one—or could be did they have it. This same ta-a-ackle could be used to help sway that buildin' up, plumb and true. Then haul out that rotten sill she's got on the downside and go out back and cut about four trees out of the fifty acres of 'em your father's got, and hew out timber——”

“Could—could you do it, sir?”

Ned stared in scorn. “Now what's the use of talkin' like that? Sure, I could do it. But it won't be allowed. Tear her down! Build up somethin' new and cute. Somethin' made of two-by-fours and patent sidin', all painted white. And you know there's more pity than that to it. I was goin' to try to make a trade with you—did you keep that barn—for a fine calf. I got a good one comin' Friday, maybe Saturday. I was goin' to offer it for eight dollars.”

“I'm going to have ten——”

Ned's grim headshake made the boy's eager eyes cloud, then fill.

“Hey,” the old man said. “Hey, what you takin' on about? Robert, come back here. Come back and get your ta-a-ackle.”

The boy, with the rope in a long coil hanging over his shoulder and a block in each hand, was a small, sad figure moving down the road when Ned spied the white china eggs. He snatched them and started up, then settled back.

“He presented me them,” he said. “Never thanked him. Poor young'un. Damn—damn the rich.”

The boy dumped the tackle on the rock outcrop where the ringbolt was. The lower block's hook must have been made to go into the ring, it looked so strong there. Tugging, he opened the tackle. Then he went into the tie-up and came back, dragging the logging chain. The chain joined the tackle. All that remained was to get the chain high up on the barn's middle post. He would sway his own barn up true. He'd haul on his Sir Galahad blocks and show his father. Maybe, if he showed his father——

The hurricane named Edna sang her terrible contralto, ripping up Maine's tender belly. The glaciers were dying in Greenland and Davis Strait, and the polar air current that had veered her frustrated forebears—all the hurricanes of the past since time began that weathered Hatteras—eastward out to sea, had changed its flow. She was loosed to hold a north course and slam into New England, that had no defense against her. She was too heavily fanged with low-glass, rain-weighted, hundred-mile-an-hour, punching, southwest and northwest squall for a land that faced the other way and knew only northeast gale, whirling with snow, or southeast with the foghorns crying, to withstand. She knew what she was. There was no mistaking the song she was singing.

"From now on," she warned, "we are on a new course. You'll remember me. Your soft, big-topped pines with tap roots shallow over ledge. Your fat, bushy maples. Your puny moored boats against your rock-bound shore. Your old, tall, wooden buildings built for weight of snow and winter's thin, keen little wind. Watch and I'll show you weak from strong."

She had one mercy. Her speed was merciful. She was moving her center at fifty knots when she crossed the New Hampshire line. She was three quarters blown, with the hardest quarter still to come, when the boy's father, frantic from worry and the hardest drive of his life out of New York and around Boston and down No. 1, and then at the last out his own town road until a crashed pine blocked the way a mile from home, pinned his son in the trembling beam of a flashlight. There was another flashlight following, that made a quick cast up into the barn's upper fastness and hung there, running down the rooftree before it, too, shone in the boy's desperate eyes. He was in his rainy-day black slicker coat and small sou'wester, and he was dug in, pulling on his tackle's fall. His father grabbed for him, and when he fell away his father snatched at his hands, trying to break his grip on the rope.

"No! No!" the boy screamed. "Help me pull! We can save it!"

"Bill," a deep voice that was not his father's shouted, "wait a minute! What have you got here, buster?"

A big hand clamped on the rope beside the boy's, and the other ran the flashlight up the tackle and chain to where it looped around the post.

"Hold this light!" the deep, almost merry voice said. "Wait for the next punch of wind!"

The squall came southwest. The old building shook as if the earth and the very granite of Maine were shuddering from power of wind. The blocks creaked as the big man hauled and the chain brought up taut and scattered shining drops of rain as it vibrated in the light the boy held. The make-fast was a quick pass and double hitch around the ringbolt by the stranger's big hands and then one of them was gently pushing against the boy's wet rubber coat.

"Come on," the deep voice said close to his ear. "This is all we can do now. Your father wants us to come into the house."

In the living room, there were just the two flashlights. His father and the big man stood there with their coats on. He kept his coat on.

"Thank God you are all right, Robert," his father said. "We talked about you all the way up. This is Mr. Cushing. He said no hurricane could kill a boy who had lived a year in Maine."

"Robert," Mr. Cushing said, "your father's still driving that car. Do you know where the liquor locker is?"

"I'm sorry," the boy's father said. "I'll get it. I need one myself."

"Do you live in Maine, sir?" the boy said.

"No." Mr. Cushing sat down in the big chair by the window. "Not now. I've been here a great deal. Your father made me come on this trip. I've written a book about American barns, and he likes it. I said something about barns and boys in it, and your father said that made me an expert. He wanted some advice. He said he wasn't sure."

"About my barn, sir?" the boy asked.

"Yes. He'd been thinking about you and your barn all week," he said. "Who rigged that jury brace, Robert?"

Such a wave of happiness because his father had been thinking about him possessed the boy that he jabbered fast, "That's my Sir Galahad ta-a-ackle. I found it in the hay. Mr. Weeks and I traded—"

"Your what? What did you call it?"

"Mr. Weeks said it was like Sir Galahad because his strength was as the strength of ten, so I named it that. It isn't the strength of ten, because it is a two-way two-way and that only makes four—"

"Bill," Mr. Cushing said to the boy's father as he came in with the whisky tray, "I want that manuscript back. Robert is telling a fine yarn here. . . . Tell us about that Sir Galahad block and ta-a-ackle, Robert. All of it."

The boy did. About Giant's horseshoe that started his finding things, then about uncovering the ring in the rock, and then the old rotten rope that pulled the two fine blocks out of the hay, and the sauerkraut crock and Mr. Weeks. The storm was very bad even inside the double-plate-glass picture window that deadened the roar of it, but his father's spectacles never left the boy's face and his eyes were filled with love of him. The boy talked on just for him, and told him everything, even about the calf. Once, in one of the heaviest squalls, he stopped because he thought he had heard something crash. Mr. Cushing knew what he was worrying about.

"That wasn't the barn," he said. "A piece of roof maybe. I'm listening. You go on talking, Robert. It's a fine story."

The heaviest squall of all was the end of everything. The wind was over northwest then. That was the squall that blew down all the pines and twisted the tops out of the maples and filled the air with shingles and roof boards like driven leaves. It grabbed the house in its terrible grip and shook it. The boy covered his ears, and Mr. Cushing jumped up and said, "Nothing can take this much longer." But his father sat still.

"What can I do with it, Jim?" his father said.

"No matter what's left out there?" Mr. Cushing said, sitting down again.

"I think so," his father said.

"Simply restore it. It's 1800. It unquestionably is as old as your oldest deed. Just remember what 1800 is and you'll spend more money. John Adams was President then. In another five years, Nelson would fight Trafalgar. . . . Where's that next squall? I keep sitting here waiting for it like my old Aunt Maria waiting for lightning to strike. . . . Listen, Bill; the main timbers were very likely cut within a year or two of the time the masts of the Constitution—her first masts—were felled in Windsor Town, not ten miles from here. Without even looking at it closely, it's a magnificent, historical old Maine building. When you're done you'll have—you've read my book—a living, functioning chunk of the past. Just as useful as anything you could ever build."

"That's what interests me," the boy's father said. "Look! There's moonlight!"

There was tattered moonlight sliding and moving across the bars of the barn's skinned off roof. Only its rafters, shining like silver bars, and its long rooftree were left aloft. You could look up through them and see the ragged cloud edges hurrying by the moon, and then there were stars. The only sound was a patterning drip from the soaked rafters. The barn's frame and everything below were unchanged. The tie-up was undamaged. The big posts stood with their same southeast lean, no more marked than before. The block and tackle and the chain were not pulling very hard now. They sagged as if they had loosened, and the boy followed Mr. Cushing there to see.

"Sir Galahad knew he was in a fight," Mr. Cushing said. "Here, Jim. That was terrific force to do that. That last big northwest squall, undoubtedly."

Mr. Cushing's light pointed the ring. It was stretched until it was a loop. Rust had flaked away and bright gray iron showed from the stress.

"You've saved your barn, Robert," the boy's father said. "We'll

make it a fine one for you. I'm proud of you. I've never been so proud of anything."

"Old 'T aint," the boy said, grabbing for his father's middle to bury his head there and hide his tears and his exhaustion. "I love Old 'T aint."

There was the clump of a heavy hoof on the wooden ramp outside the big doors. The near door slid open and, in the light of his lantern, Ned Weeks stood there. There was a watery smear of blood down his left cheek from a red cut over his eye.

"I ain't got no more home than a jay bird," he said, "and my cow's goin' to calf. I'm blown down flat. Can I borry your tie-up for a short spell?"

"Certainly!" the boy's father said. "Anything we've got!"

"Thank ye. Been a bad hurricane. Bewilderin' amount of wind. That boy around? Where's that boy? . . . Robert, drive in the team and unhitch for me. I got to hurry some with my cow, Betsy."

HER SHADOW LOVE

By WILLIAM HEUMAN

EVERY night at six-thirty, even though she's in the middle of the dishes, my wife, Myrtle, knocks off and turns on the television to this Liberace. Maybe I got the news on, or the weather, but that don't matter. Six-thirty, it's Liberace, even if the Russians come and drop that big bomb over Flatbush, Brooklyn, which is where we live.

Once I used to kid her about it. I'd make some wisecrack like, "What's this guy got that I don't have, baby?"

She don't even answer that one. She just looks at me. You know what I mean? I feel like I'm some bum dropped off one of the cattle cars and was sitting out on the stoop looking for a handout.

We're married, you understand. We have two kids half grown up. We have this little flat in Brooklyn, which is small, but comfortable, and we don't owe anybody any money. There's always enough to eat on the table and the kids have good clothes. I don't make a million bucks down in the shop, but it's steady, and we got our union in case somebody gets ideas.

So Myrtle and me have our scraps now and then, but it's over in an hour. Everybody has scraps, but with this Liberace it's different. She don't fight; she don't argue. She just looks at me as

she's sitting there on the edge of the chair, a dish towel in her hands. She looks at him at the piano, in his white tie and that long coat with the tails.

She looks at him and she looks at me, and she don't say anything, but that don't mean she's not thinking.

"He's a gentleman," she says once when they're doing the commercial for his program.

"So I'll put my shoes on," I tell her, "an' I'll be a gentleman, though if this guy hadda be on his feet all day like I do, he might have his shoes off too."

"There are other differences," she says.

"Sure," I grin. "He has calluses where I'll never get 'em until I'm sixty-five an' on Social Security."

This gets me nowhere.

The piano playing I don't mind. The guy is real good. It's in between numbers when he's talking to the women like he was their best friend, and he's so glad they tuned his way that he could drop dead. You know what I mean?

So this goes on every night, and if I have to work overtime some night, I eat alone, and I got piano music to go with it. Six-thirty is Liberace in our house come hell or high water.

They got Liberace next door too. My neighbor, Joe Armbruster, is in the same boat.

"She's nuts," Joe says about his wife. "This guy smiles, an' she's ready to take off to the moon."

"It's that wink gets 'em," I tell him. "He's allus winkin'."

"So he's a pianner player," Joe says, "an' he looks like he come outa a bandbox, an' he loves everybody. So what?"

"He loves his mother," I say.

"So he should love his mother an' leave the wives alone," Joe scowls. "Other night I try to talk to Mabel nice an' soft, like he does, an' what does she say?"

"What?" I ask him.

"Stop kiddin'," she says."

"I know how it is," I tell him. "You can't play a pianner these days, an' wear a white tie an' tails, an' you're a bum."

"You think maybe they'll get over it?" Joe asks hopefully.

"I wouldn't make a bet on it," I tell him. "Liable to get worse. Maybe they'll put this guy on for an hour instead of half an hour. Maybe he'll be goin' on later at night, right in the middle o' one o' the Brooklyn night games."

"Like hell," Joe says. "She gets her own TV set, then."

It don't get any better in our house. Every night I come home from the shop I'm knocked out. I want to get my shoes off and hit the armchair in the corner. I get the newspapers and I get my feet up on a chair. You know how it is when you put in your eight hours in the shop, and you been kicked around in the subway, coming and going.

Myrtle comes in at six-thirty with the dish towel over her shoulder, and she sits on the edge of a chair as old White Tie comes on with that big smile.

I look at him over the top of the newspaper, and even I feel a little happy. That's the way the guy makes you feel. You know?

I say to Myrtle, "Front-row seat, an' right in your own house. You pay two-twenty to hear a guy like that over in Town Hall."

She don't say anything; she don't look at me.

O.K., so I read the sports pages and let it ride. I listen to this guy play and talk in that nice, soft voice, and it kind of puts you to sleep.

Outside, in the kitchen, the kids are rushing through their homework so's they can look at Red Skelton or somebody, before they go to bed. The apartment is warm and comfortable. My feet begin to feel good with the shoes off.

You hear the guy talking and you hear the piano, and after a while you kind of doze off. Maybe you snore a little bit. Myrtle says I do. I don't believe it.

When I wake up again, he's signing off. It's "good-by, everybody," and that big smile like he's your best pal, the best friend you ever had, and he hates to be leaving, but he'll come back as soon as he can make it. In the meantime keep your chin up and always be nice and good.

When he's off, Myrtle looks over at me, and there's a funny expression on her face like I never seen there before.

She says quietly, "Some marriage. Some romance."

Then she goes out to the kitchen and starts banging the pots and pans around as she finishes the dishes.

So now she's got me going. I'm an easy guy, but some things I don't take. I go to the bedroom and get my slippers and I put them on. Then I tighten my belt and I go out to the kitchen.

I say, "Let's get this straight, baby. You didn't marry no Liberace. You married a guy named Al."

"Don't shout," she says. "You don't have to tell the neighbors all about it."

"I'll tell 'em," I say. "Just because a guy puts a candlestick on top of a pianner an' talks like he's your Dutch uncle, don't make me no bum. I'm the guy has to buck that subway rush every mornin', rain or shine, to bring home the bacon."

"Candelabra," she says.

"What?" I ask.

"Never mind," she says, "and stop shouting at me."

"I'm tellin' you," I say. "You don't like me hangin' around the house in my stocking feet, I can always hang around Benny's Bar an' Grill nights."

"You don't have to get nasty about it," she says, and I can see her face is kind of white.

I would like to stop now, but I'm in this pretty far, and you know how it is when you jump into the water. It takes a little while to get out again.

I say, "You'd put up some howl if I was to sit around nights an' watch some doll-faced singer who was talkin' like she was talkin' just to me."

"You're not the type," Myrtle says.

"I could be the type," I tell her. "Maybe you're forgettin' that I knew other girls before I married you."

"I remember that you were quite a wolf," she retorts.

When I was a wolf, they used to call them sheiks. But this

goes to show you how a woman's mind works. First I'm not the type, and then all of a sudden I'm a wolf.

"You don't have to brag about your female conquests," Myrtle says, "right in front of your children."

"Who's braggin'?" I holler.

"Some of these dolls should see you now," she says.

"An' you ain't no Marilyn Monroe, neither," I tell her, so she slams the towel down and off she goes to the bedroom, and the dishes not done yet.

The bedroom door bangs shut, and that's the end of that. I say to Ruthie, our girl, who is eleven, "You better finish up them dishes, honey."

"O.K., pop," she says. She looks at me kind of funny, as if she's wondering whether I did really have a bunch of dames on a string.

I go outside and I sit on the stoop, and after a while Joe Armbruster comes out and lights a cigarette and sits down on the step beneath me.

He says, "That Liberace. Kids want to see the cartoons. I'd like to see the news. What do we get?"

"Liberace," I say. "He's got it so's my wife ain't talkin' to me no more."

Joe looks at me with interest, and I see I'm worse off than he is.

"What happened, Al?" he asks.

"She bust out the room," I tell him, "so I sleep on the couch tonight. That's how she likes it, that's how she gets it."

"Women are nuts," Joe says.

"Don't tell me," I say. "I married one of 'em."

"They come around," Joe says. "After a while they all come around again. They go through cycles. You have to take it from where it comes, Al."

"It can go back from where it comes, too," I growl. "She calls me a wolf. Seven nights a week I stay home, and there she sits gapin' at old White Tie every night. I'm the wolf."

"It ain't love with them," Joe tries to explain. "I read about this

in a magazine. This guy stands for somethin' they never had. You know what I mean, Al?"

"What he stands for they'll never get, neither," I tell him. "How many guys walk around Brooklyn with white ties an' tails? Maybe when you get married you put on a monkey suit, but that's all."

"They dream about it," Joe Armbruster explained. "They dream like you're Liberace, sittin' at a pianner, playin' all them songs."

"That's a pipe dream," I say. "I never played nothin' bigger than a harmonica."

"This magazine says it don't do 'em no harm," Joe goes on. "It makes 'em feel good."

"This guy wrote that," I tell him, "should meet my wife."

"Don't let it get you," Joe says.

So that night I sleep in the living room on the couch, and in the morning I'm off to work before Myrtle even gets up. I have a cup of coffee in a diner, and I let it go at that.

I don't have a good day that day, though. You know how it is when you've had a fight with your wife.

In the shop everybody says, "You got a hang-over, Al?"

"Never mind," I tell them.

You let a thing like this get the best of you, and pretty soon the whole world's sour. You know?

So on the way home on the subway I get to thinking. So this Liberace is flowers and music and soft words. O.K., so I'll be the same. So I can't play the pianner; I'll pick up a dozen roses in the florist down the street. How long has it been since I came home with roses?

You got a couple of kids to feed and buy clothes for, and you got a refrigerator and a TV set to pay off, and you don't think of no roses. So what's a buck or two?

I get these roses in the florist, and the guy in the store, who knows me, says, "Somebody die, Al?"

"Never mind with the wisecracks," I tell him. "Just wrap up the flowers."

It's about quarter to six when I get to the house, and I don't want to show Myrtle these flowers right away. I leave 'em out in the hall, and I figure when this Liberace comes on tonight, I'll bring the flowers in and hand them to her. I won't even take my shoes off tonight, and she'll look at me, and it will be like I'm wearing a white tie and tails.

I smell that we got pork chops for supper, and pork chops I like the way Liberace likes that piano, so I figure maybe Myrtle is trying to make things good again too. I hang up my hat and coat in the closet, and I hear Ruthie out in the kitchen with her mother. The television's not on, which means that Edward, my boy, who is nine, is maybe next door with Joe Armbruster's kid.

I see his hockey stick on the floor, though, which is where he leaves it quite often, along with about everything else he's supposed to put in his room. The kids on this block play street hockey with roller skates and hockey sticks, and they're pretty good at it too. I bend down to pick up Edward's hockey stick, and then I straighten up with it. Maybe I'm getting older than I think; maybe I'm not a good judge of distance any more, but when I turn around with this stick I ram the end of it right into the TV picture. There's a bang and an explosion as the picture tube goes. You hear glass shattering inside the set. Myrtle lets out a little scream and comes bursting into the room.

"What happened?" she yells.

I'm standing there with this hockey stick in my hands, and I'm looking at the set. I'm thinking what it costs to buy a new picture tube for a TV set, and I'm ready to wrap this hockey stick around my head.

Then Myrtle sees the set with the cracked glass in front, and no picture tube. Her face goes white as she looks at it, and then at me with this stick in my hand.

"You did it," she says softly, like she's one of them women on television talking to a guy who just killed some other guy. "You did it."

"Look——" I start to tell her, but that's as far as I get.

"You didn't want me to see him," she moans. "You couldn't stand it any more."

"What?" I yell.

She grabs Ruthie by the arm, and she says, "We're going. You'll never have to see us again."

"You nuts?" I whoop.

"You'll find out," she says, and she's off.

She don't even put her coat on. She grabs it out of the closet, and she's headed for the door, pulling Ruthie along by the arm.

I'm so mad I can't even yell at her any more. I stand there like a dope as she slams the door behind her, and then I smell these pork chops burning in the frying pan, and I got to run out into the kitchen.

I want to fling the pan out into the back yard, but I don't. After a while I even sit down and I start to eat the chops, burned and all. I don't know what I'm eating anyway. They're crazy, I tell you. Every one of them is crazy. I broke my own TV set! A forty-buck tube I broke on purpose, so's she can't hear this Liberace! The guy never got me that mad.

I'm eating these here burned pork chops and then the phone rings, and it's my father-in-law, John Hammerschmidt, who lives three blocks away. John is about five feet two inches tall, but he sounds like a giant on the phone.

He has a big, booming voice, and he says, "Al, what the hell is the matter?"

"Not a thing," I tell him. "I'm eatin' burned pork chops for supper."

"Myrtle's here," he whoops, "and she says she's through with you. Says you smashed the television so's she couldn't hear Liberace. Look, Al, I gotta listen to Liberace, too, an' I don't go around smashin' no television sets."

"For your information, Mr. Hammerschmidt," I tell him, "I never smashed no television set."

"Myrtle says you did."

"Myrtle's nuts," I tell him.

"That's beside the point," he says. "What am I gonna do here with your wife an' two kids, Al? We got two rooms in this place."

"They know where they live," I tell him, "an' it's only three blocks away. I ain't sendin' no golden chariot after 'em."

"What about the TV set?" he wants to know.

"It was a accident," I tell him. "I backed into it with Edward's hockey stick. She don't want to believe that, she can sleep on the kitchen floor in your place."

I hang up the phone with a bang, and I go back to my burned pork chops. The way I'm feeling now, I don't care if nobody comes back. I'll just go on eating these here pork chops till I bust.

Then there's a knock on the door, and Joe Armbruster comes in. He scratches his head, and he says, "Myrtle busted into our place an' took Edward with her. Said to my wife she was through with you, Al. What goes?"

"She run off with Liberace," I tell him.

"Come again," he says.

"She skipped out," I say. "Went back to her mother's 'cause I broke the TV set."

I see the interest come into his eyes. "Did you, Al?" he asks, and he goes into the living room to have a look at it. When he comes back he says thoughtfully, "Maybe you got somethin' here, Al."

"You think I'm nuts," I say, "to break a forty-dollar pitcher tube on purpose?"

"You got no more Liberace," he points out.

"I got no more wife, neither," I tell him, and now for the first time it's beginning to hit home.

Supposing she don't come back? Supposing she gets on her high horse and says to herself, "To hell with you, Al Brewster." Who's ahead, then?

"You got nerve," Joe says admiringly, and I can see he still thinks I did it on purpose.

"O.K., so I got nerve," I tell him.

This guy I don't want to see, neither. There's nobody I want to see but my wife and two kids walk in through that door.

After a while Joe gets out, and I clean up the dishes and pots. It's already past suppertime, so it looks like she's not coming, and I get that sick feeling in the pit of my stomach. You know how it gets you.

I pick up a paper and I try to read it, but that's no good, either. I think maybe I'd better call up John Hammerschmidt, my father-in-law, and see what goes, but I already told her she could come home. Maybe I didn't say it in the nicest way, but then, what she said to me wasn't said in the nicest way, neither.

So I sit here and I figure how long it would take her to walk the three blocks from her father's house. They're short blocks, and if she'd started when John called, before, she'd have been here already. So she's not coming.

This I let sink in awhile. What happens when your wife leaves? You go on like before? You go to work the same way, and come home at night to an empty house? What do you work for? Where are you going?

A guy starts thinking along these lines, and pretty soon he stuffs pieces of rag around the windows and the door sills, and he turns on the gas stove, only he don't light it. You know what I mean?

I get up and I walk around the room a few times, and I keep listening for the door to open downstairs in the vestibule. I don't hear anything, though. It's so quiet in the apartment you can hear yourself think. Even this Liberace I'd like to hear now; even the kids fighting with each other, but I guess that's over.

I sit around for about ten minutes more, and all the time I'm feeling worse. If she was coming home she'd have been home by now. She could have walked ten blocks instead of three. So it's finished; so I'm a single man again sitting here with a busted TV set.

I pick up a newspaper and I look at it for a few minutes, but it don't make sense, so I put it down again. I go into the front room and I look out the window which faces on the street.

Everybody's eating supper or cleaning up supper dishes at this time, and the street is empty. So she's not coming.

A guy can go nuts sitting around an empty house. I put on my coat and I go out in the street, and I start walking, and pretty soon I'm out in front of Benny's Bar and Grill on the corner.

It's empty because the regular crowd don't come in till later. I see Benny reading a newspaper down at the far end of the bar. Benny I know well. We went to school together at the public school over on Jackson Street. Benny knows me and he knows Myrtle, who was in the same class with us. He's a short, fat little guy with a lot less hair than I got.

I go inside and Benny looks up from the paper. "How's it, Al?" he says.

"A highball," I tell him.

"Come again?" he says.

"You can hear good," I say, "an' I pay cash when I come into this establishment. This ain't on the cuff, Benny."

"O.K.," Benny murmurs, "but you don't go for the hard stuff, Al. I was just wonderin'. You have a beer now an' then."

"So tonight I'm havin' a highball," I tell him, "an' maybe not just one, neither."

"You're the boss," Benny says, but he don't look like he's too happy about it. "A little trouble at home, Al?" he says. "Myrtle cuttin' up?"

"You ever seen a woman didn't cause no trouble?" I ask him.

"I'm a bachelor," Benny says.

"So stay happy," I tell him. "So don't go cuttin' your own throat by gettin' married to some woman."

"What happened?" Benny wants to know while he's getting this highball for me.

I tell him about Liberace, and about how Myrtle thinks I'm a bum, and how I busted the TV set by accident.

"So she runs off to John Hammerschmidt's," I finish, "an' I have burned pork chops fer supper, an' she ain't comin' back."

"That's tough," Benny says. "Women get excited like that, Al."

I tell him about the roses, and how I left them out in the hall, where they're still laying, for all I know.

"That's real tough," Benny says.

The highball is hot inside of me, but it don't seem to help none. I sit there at the bar, and I notice that it's six-thirty on the clock, which is Liberace time.

Benny has a TV set above the bar, but it's not on now.

I say, "Turn him on, Benny."

"Who?" Benny asks.

"That Liberace," I tell him. "I got nothin' against the guy."

"Sure," Benny says, and he turns on the set, and pretty soon you see that big, golden smile again, and he's saying as how he's so glad to be with us again that he could die. "He can play that pianner," Benny says.

I sit there at the bar and I listen to him play, and I remember how nice it was when we had him tuned in at our house, and Myrtle was sitting on the edge of a chair, and I was half reading the paper and half asleep. That's over the hill; that's gone with the wind.

"Another highball," I tell Benny.

He looks at me and he rubs his chin, and then he says, "I got to get some stock up from the cellar, Al. Hang on to the one you got for a while."

He goes in the back, and I watch this Liberace. He plays one of them Strauss waltzes that Myrtle used to like so much. You know the way he plays it.

Benny's gone a long time, and when he comes back the Strauss waltz is over and Liberace is into something else.

"He's got it tonight," Benny says, nodding toward the TV set.

"What about that highball?"

"I forgot," he says. "Comin' right up, Al."

He never gets it up, though. He takes a long time at the other end of the bar, and before he can bring the drink up to me, I hear the door open and I think it's some guy coming in to have a beer, but it's not.

Myrtle says behind me, "Al, come on home."

I turn around to look at her, and I see she's been crying.
"Al," she says, "I want to go home and get my roses."

I find out on the way home that Benny called her at John Hammerschmidt's and told her all about it—about the roses and all.

She'd left the kids there and came right down.

"I'm sorry, Al," she says.

"I never busted the set," I tell her. "It was that lousy hockey stick."

When she finds the roses laying in the hall, she starts crying all over again, and I kind of feel like crying, myself. So the gas company don't make no money on me tonight.

The kids are having a late supper over at John Hammerschmidt's, so we're home alone, and Myrtle, sitting there on the sofa with these roses in her lap, and still crying a little.

It's about seven-thirty when Joe Armbruster knocks on the door and sticks his head in.

He grins a little, and he says, "Glad to see you all back."

"Likewise," I tell him.

He looks at the roses Myrtle is holding, and he scratches his nose, and then he says, "My wife figures it might take a little while to get that new pitcher tube, Myrtle. Any night you wanna watch this Liberace, you come over."

"That's nice," I tell him. "Ain't that nice, Myrtle?"

"There's no rush," Myrtle says, and then she looks at me, and she's smiling through the tears. "There's no rush," she says.

Everything is O.K. again, and so what did it cost me? A busted TV tube and a bunch of roses. I figure I got the best of the deal by a long shot. You know what I mean?

LONG SHORT STORIES

THE ANSWER

By PHILIP WYLIE

FIFTEEN MINUTES!" . . . The loud-speakers blared on the flight deck, boomed below, and murmured on the bridge where the brass was assembling. The length of the carrier was great. Consonants from distant horns came belatedly to every ear, and metal fabric set up echoes besides. So the phrase stuttered through the ship and over the sea. Fifteen minutes to the bomb test.

Maj. Gen. Marcus Scott walked to the cable railing around the deck and looked at the very blue morning. The ship's engines had stopped and she lay still, aimed west toward the target island like an arrow in a drawn bow.

Men passing saluted. The general returned the salutes, bringing a weathered hand to a lofty forehead, to straight, coal-black hair above gray eyes and the hawk nose of an Indian.

His thoughts veered to the weather. The far surface of the Pacific was lavender; the nearby water, seen deeper, a lucent violet. White clouds passed gradually—clouds much of a size and shape—with cobalt avenues between. The general, to whom the sky was more familiar than the sea, marveled at that mechanized appearance. It was as if some cosmic weather engine—east, and below the Equator—puffed clouds from Brobdingna-

giant stacks and sent them rolling over the earth, as regular and even-spaced as the white snorts of a climbing locomotive.

He put away the image. Such fantasy belonged in another era, when he had been a young man at West Point, a brilliant young man, more literary than military, a young man fascinated by the "soldier poets" of the first World War. The second, which he had helped to command in the air, produced no romanticists. Here a third war was in the making, perhaps, a third that might put an end to poetry forever.

"Ten minutes! All personnel complete checks, take assigned stations for test!"

General Scott went across the iron deck on scissoring legs that seemed to hurry the tall man without themselves hurrying. Sailors had finished stringing the temporary cables which, should a freak buffet from the H-bomb reach the area, would prevent them from being tossed overboard. They were gathering, now, to watch. Marc Scott entered the carrier's island and hastened to the bridge on turning steps of metal, not using the shined brass rail.

Admiral Stanforth was there—anvil shoulders, marble hair, feldspar complexion. Pouring coffee for Senator Blaine with a good-host chuckle and that tiger look in the corners of his eyes. "Morning, Marc! Get any sleep at all?" He gave the general no time to answer. "This is General Scott, gentlemen. In charge of today's drop. Commands base on Sangre Islands. Senator Blaine—"

The senator had the trappings of office: the *embonpoint* and shrewd eyes, the pince-nez on a ribbon, the hat with the wide brim that meant a Western or Southern senator. He had the William Jennings Bryan voice. But these were for his constituents.

The man who used the voice said genuinely, "General, I'm honored. Your record in the Eighth Air Force is one we're almost too proud of to mention in front of you."

"Thank you, sir."

"You know Doctor Trumbull?"

Trumbul was thin and thirty, an all-brown scholar whose brown eyes were so vivid the rest seemed but a background for his eyes. His hand clasped Scott's. "All too well! I flew with Marc Scott when we dropped Thermonuclear Number Eleven—on a parachutel!"

There was some laughter; they knew about that near-disastrous test.

"How's everybody at Los Alamos?" the general asked.

The physicist shrugged. "Same. They'll feel better later today—if this one comes up to expectations."

The admiral was introducing again. "Doctor Antheim, general. Antheim's from MIT. He's also the best amateur magician I ever saw perform. Too bad you came aboard so late last night."

Antheim was as quietly composed as a family physician—a big man in a gray suit.

"Five minutes!" the loud-speaker proclaimed.

You could see the lonely open ocean, the sky, the cumulus clouds. But the target island—five miles long and jungle-painted—lay over the horizon. An island created by volcanic cataclysm millions of years ago and destined this day to vanish in a man-patented calamity. Somewhere a hundred thousand feet above, his own ship, a B-111, was moving at more than seven hundred miles an hour, closing on an imaginary point from which, along an imaginary line, a big bomb would curve earthward, never to hit, but utterly to devastate. You could not see his B-111 and you would probably not even see the high, far-off tornadoes of smoke when, the bomb away, she let go with her rockets to hurtle off even faster from the expanding sphere of blast.

"Personally," Antheim, the MIT scientist, was saying to General Larsen, "it's my feeling that whether or not your cocker is a fawning type depends on your attitude as a dog owner. I agree, all cockers have Saint Bernard appetites. Nevertheless, I'm sold on spaniels. In field trials last autumn—"

Talking about dogs. Well, why not? Random talk was the best antidote for tension, for the electrically counted minutes

that stretched unbearably because of their measurement. He had a dog—his kids had one, rather: Pompey, the mutt, whose field trials took place in the yards and playgrounds of Baltimore, Maryland, in the vicinity of Millbrook Road. He wondered what would be happening at home—where Ellen would be at—he calculated time belts, the hour-wide, orange-peel-shaped sections into which man had carved his planet. Be evening on Millbrook Road—

John Farrier arrived—Farrier, of the great Farrier Corporation. His pale blue eyes looked out over the ship's flat deck toward the west, the target. But he was saying to somebody, in his crisp yet not uncourteous voice, "I consider myself something of a connoisseur in the matter of honey. We have our own apiary at Hobe Sound. Did you ever taste antidesma honey? Or the honey gathered from palmetto flowers?"

"Two minutes!"

The count-down was the hardest part of a weapons test. What went before was work—sheer work, detailed, exhausting. But what came after had excitements, real and potential, like hazardous exploring, the general thought; you never knew precisely what would ensue. Not precisely.

Tension, he repeated to himself. And he thought, *Why do I feel sad? Is it prescience of failure? Will we finally manage to produce a dud?*

Fatigue, he answered himself. Setting up this one had been a colossal chore. They called it Bugaboo—Operation Bugaboo in Test Series Avalanche. Suddenly he wished Bugaboo wouldn't go off.

"One minute! All goggles in place! Exposed personnel without goggles, sit down, turn backs toward west, cover eyes with hands!"

Before he blacked out the world, he took a last look at the sky, the sea—and the sailors, wheeling, sitting, covering their eyes. Then he put on the goggles. The obsidian lenses brought absolute dark. From habit, he cut his eyes back and forth to

make certain there was no leak of light—light that could damage the retina.

“Ten seconds!”

The ship drew a last deep breath and held it. In an incredibly long silence, the general mused on thousands upon thousands of other men in other ships, ashore and in the air, who now were also holding back breathing.

“Five!”

An imbecile notion flickered in the general's brain and expired: He could leap up and cry “Stop!” He still could. A word from Stanforth. A button pressed. The whole shebang would chute on down, unexploded. And umpteen million dollars' worth of taxpayers' money would be wasted by that solitary syllable of his.

“Four!”

Still, the general thought, his lips smiling, his heart frozen, why should they—or anybody—*be doing this?*

“Three seconds . . . two . . . one . . . zero!”

Slowly, the sky blew up.

On the horizon, a supersun grabbed up degrees of diameter and rose degrees. The sea, ship, praying sailors became as plain as they had been bare-eyed in full sun, then plainer still. Eyes, looking through the inky glass, saw the universe stark white. A hundred-times-sun-sized sun mottled itself with lesser whiteness, bulked up, became the perfect sphere, ascending hideously and setting forth on the Pacific a molten track from ship to livid self. Tumors of light more brilliant than the sun sprang up on the mathematical sphere; yet these, less blazing than the fireball, appeared as blacknesses.

The thing swelled and swelled and rose; nonetheless, instant miles of upthrust were diminished by the expansion. Abruptly, it exploded around itself a white lewd ring, a halo.

For a time there was no air beneath it, only the rays and neutrons in vacuum. The atmosphere beyond—incandescent, compressed harder than steel—moved toward the spectators. No sound.

The fireball burned within itself and around itself, burnt the sea away—a hole in it—and a hole in the planet. It melted part way, lopsided, threw out a cubic mile of fire this way—a scarlet asteroid, that.

To greet the birthing of a new, brief star, the regimental sky hung a bunting on every cloud. The mushroom formed quietly, immensely and in haste; it towered, spread, and the incandescent air hurtled at the watchers on the circumferences. In the mushroom new fire burst forth, cubic miles of phosphor-pale flame. The general heard Antheim sigh. That would be the "igniter effect," the new thing, to set fire, infinitely, in the wake of the fire blown out by the miles-out blast. A hellish bit of physics.

Again, again, again the thorium-lithium pulse! Each time—had it been other than jungle and sea; had it been a city, Baltimore—the urban tinder, and the people, would have hair-fired in the debris.

The mushroom climbed on its stalk, the ten-mile circle of what had been part of earth. It split the atmospheric layers and reached for the purple dark, that the flying general knew, where the real sun was also unbearably bright.

Mouths agape, goggles now dangling, the men on the bridge of the *Ticonderoga* could look naked-eyed at the sky's exploded rainbows and seething prismatic.

"Stand by for the blast wave!"

It came like the shadow of eclipse. The carrier shuddered. Men sagged, spun on their bottoms. The general felt the familiar compression, a thousand boxing gloves, padded but hitting squarely every part of his body at once.

Then Antheim and Trumbul were shaking hands.

"Congratulations! That ought to be—about it!"

It for what? The enemy? A city? Humanity?

"Magnificent," said Senator Blaine. He added, "We seem O.K."

"Good thing too," a voice laughed. "A dozen of the best sets of brains in America, right in this one spot."

The general thought about that. Two of the world's leading

nuclear physicists, the ablest member of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, a senator wise for all his vaudeville appearance, an unbelievably versatile industrialist, the Navy's best tactician. Good brains. But what an occupation for human brains!

Unobtrusively he moved to the iron stairs—the "ladder." Let the good brains and the sight-seers gape at the kaleidoscope aloft. He hurried to his assigned office.

An hour later he had received the important reports.

His B-111 was back on the field, "hot," but not dangerous; damaged, but not severely; the crew in good shape. Celebrating, Major Stokely had bothered to add.

Two drones lost; three more landed in unapproachable condition. One photo recon plane had been hit by a flying chunk of something eighteen miles from ground zero and eight minutes—if the time was right—after the blast. Something that had been thrown mighty high or somehow remained aloft a long while. Wing damage and radioactivity; but, again, no personnel injured.

Phones rang. Messengers came—sailors—quick, quiet, polite. The *Ticonderoga* was moving, moving swiftly, in toward the place where nothing was, in under the colored bomb clouds.

He had a sensation that something was missing, that more was to be done, that news awaited—which he attributed again to tiredness. Tiredness: what a general was supposed never to feel—and the burden that settled on every pair of starred shoulders. He sighed and picked up the book he had read in empty spaces of the preceding night: Thoreau's *Walden Pond*.

Why had he taken Thoreau on this trip? He knew the answer. To be as far as possible, in one way, from the torrent of technology in mid-Pacific; to be as close as possible to a proper view of Atomic-Age Man, in a different way. But now he closed the book as if it had blank pages. After all, Thoreau couldn't take straight Nature, himself; a couple of years beside his pond and he went back to town and lived in Emerson's back yard. For the general that was an aggrieved and aggrieving thought.

Lieutenant Tobey hurried in from the next office. "Something special on TLS. Shall I switch it?"

His nerves tightened. He had expected "something special" on his most restricted wire, without a reason for the expectation. He picked up the instrument when the light went red. "Scott here."

"Rawson. Point L 15."

"Right." That would be instrument site near the mission school on Tempest Island.

"Matter of Import Z." Which meant an emergency.

"I see." General Scott felt almost relieved. Something was wrong; to know even that was better than to have a merely mystifying sense of wrongness.

Rawson—Maj. Dudley Rawson, the general's cleverest Intelligence officer, simply said, "Import Z, and, I'd say, general, the Z Grade."

"Can't clarify?"

"No, sir."

General Scott marveled for a moment at the tone of Rawson's voice: it was high and the syllables shook. He said, "Right, Raw. Be over." He leaned back in his chair and spoke to the lieutenant, "Would you get me Captain Elverson? I'd like a whirlybird ride."

The helicopter deposited the general in the center of the playing field where the natives at the mission school learned American games. Rawson and two others were waiting. The general gave the customary grateful good-by to his naval escort; then waited for the racket of the departing helicopter to diminish.

He observed that Major Rawson, a lieutenant he did not know and a technical sergeant were soaked with perspiration. But that scarcely surprised him; the sun was now high and the island steamed formidably.

Rawson said, "I put it through Banjo, direct to you, sir. Took the liberty. There's been a casualty."

"Lord!" The general shook his head. "Who?"

"I'd rather show you, sir." The major's eyes traveled to the road that led from the field, through banyan trees, toward the mission. Corrugated-metal roofs sparkled behind the trees, and on the road in the shade a jeep waited.

The general started for the vehicle. "Just give me what particulars you can—"

"I'd rather you saw—it—for yourself."

General Scott climbed into the car, sat, looked closely at the major.

He'd seen funk, seen panic. This was that—and more. They sweated like horses, yet they were pallid. They shook—and made no pretense of hiding or controlling it. A "casualty"—and they were soldiers! No casualty could—

"You said 'it,'" the general said. "Just what—"

"For the love of God, don't ask me to explain! It's just behind the mission buildings." Major Rawson tapped the sergeant's shoulder. "Can you drive O.K., Sam?"

The man jerked his head and started the motor. The jeep moved.

The general had impressions of buildings, of brown boys working in a banana grove, and native girls flapping along in such clothes as missionaries consider moral. Then they entered a colonnade of tree trunks which upheld the jungle canopy.

He was afraid in some new way. He must not show it. He concentrated on seeming not to concentrate.

The jeep stopped. Panting slightly, Rawson stepped out, pushed aside the fronds of a large fern tree and hurried along a leafy tunnel. "Little glade up here. That's where the casualty dropped."

"Who found—it?"

"The missionary's youngest boy. Kid named Ted. His dad too. The padre—or whatever the Devoted Brethren call 'em."

The glade appeared—a clear pool of water bordered by terrestrial orchids. A man lay in their way, face down, his clerical collar unbuttoned, his arms extended, hands clasped, breath issuing in hoarse groans.

From maps, memoranda, somewhere, the general remembered the man's name. "You mean Reverend Simms is the victim?" he asked in amazement.

"No," said Rawson; "up ahead." He led the general around the bole of a jacaranda tree. "There."

For a speechless minute the general stood still. On the ground, almost at his feet, in the full sunshine, lay the casualty.

"Agnostic," the general had been called by many; "mystic," by more; "natural philosopher," by devoted chaplains who had served with him. But he was not a man of orthodox religion.

What lay on the fringe of purple flowers was recognizable. He could not, would not, identify it aloud.

Behind him, the major, the lieutenant and the sergeant were waiting shakily for him to name it. Near them, prostrate on the earth, was the missionary—who had already named it and commenced to worship.

It was motionless. The beautiful human face slept in death; the alabastrine body was relaxed in death; the unimaginable eyes were closed and the immense white wings were folded. It was an angel.

The general could bring himself to say, in a soft voice, only, "It looks like one."

The three faces behind him were distracted. "It's an angel," Rawson said in a frantic tone. "And everything we've done, and thought, and believed is nuts! Science is nuts! Who knows, now, what the next move will be?"

The sergeant had knelt and was crossing himself. A babble of repentance issued from his lips—as if he were at confessional. Seeing the general's eyes on him, he interrupted himself to murmur, "I was brought up Catholic." Then, turning back to the figure, with the utmost fright, he crossed himself and went on in a compulsive listing of his sad misdemeanors.

The lieutenant, a buck-toothed young man, was now laughing in a morbid way. A way that was the sure prelude to hysteria.

"Shut up!" the general said; then strode to the figure among the flowers and reached down for its pulse.

At that, Reverend Simms made a sound near to a scream and leaped to his feet. His garments were stained with the black humus in which he had lain; his clerical collar flapped loosely at his neck.

"Don't you even touch it! Heretic! You are not fit to be here! You—and your martial kind—your scientists! Do you not yet see what you have done? Your last infernal bomb has shot down Gabriel, angel of the Lord! This is the end of the world!" His voice tore his throat. "And you are responsible! You are the destroyers!"

The general could not say but that every word the missionary had spoken was true. The beautiful being might indeed be Gabriel. Certainly it was an unearthly creature. The general felt a tendency, if not to panic, at least to take seriously the idea that he was now dreaming or had gone mad. Human hysteria, however, was a known field, and one with which he was equipped to deal.

He spoke sharply, authoritatively, somehow keeping his thoughts a few syllables ahead of his ringing voice, "Reverend Simms, I am a soldier in charge here. If your surmise is correct, God will be my judge. But you have not examined this pathetic victim. That is neither human nor Christian. Suppose it is only hurt, and needs medical attention? What sort of Samaritans would we be, then, to let it perish here in the heat? You may also be mistaken, and that would be a greater cruelty. Suppose it is not what you so logically assume? Suppose it merely happens to be a creature like ourselves, from some real but different planet—thrown, say, from its space-voyaging vehicle by the violence of the morning test?"

The thought, rushing into the general's mind from nowhere, encouraged him. He was at that time willing to concede the likelihood that he stood in the presence of a miracle—and a miracle of the most horrifying sort, since the angel was seemingly

dead. But to deal with men, with their minds, and even his own thought process, he needed a less appalling possibility to set alongside apparent fact. If he were to accept the miracle, he would be obliged first to alter his own deep and hard-won faith, along with its corollaries—and that would mean a change in the general's very personality. It would take pain, and time. Meanwhile there were men to deal with—men in mortal frenzy.

The missionary heard him vaguely, caught the suggestion that the general might doubt the being on the ground to be Gabriel, and burst into grotesque, astounding laughter. He rushed from the glade.

After his antic departure, the general said grimly, "That man has about lost his mind! A stupid way to behave, if what he believes is the case!" Then, in drill-sergeant tones, he barked, "Sergeant! Take a leg. . . . Lieutenant, the other. . . . Rawson, help me here."

He took gentle hold. The flesh, if it was flesh, felt cool, but not yet cold. When he lifted, the shoulder turned easily; it was less heavy than he had expected. The other men, slowly, dubiously, took stations and drew nerving breaths.

"See to it, men," the general ordered—as if it were mere routine and likely to be overlooked by second-rate soldiers—"that those wings don't drag on the ground! Let's go!"

He could observe and think a little more analytically as they carried the being toward the jeep. The single garment worn by the angel was snow-white and exquisitely pleated. The back and shoulder muscles were obviously of great power, and constructed to beat the great wings. They were, he gathered, operational wings, not vestigial. Perhaps the creature came from a small planet where gravity was so slight that these wings sufficed for flying about. That was at least thinkable.

A different theory which he entertained briefly—because he was a soldier—seemed impossible on close scrutiny. The creature they carried from the glade was not a fake—not some biological device of the enemy fabricated to startle the Free World. What they were carrying could not have been man-made, unless

the Reds had moved centuries ahead of everyone else in the science of biology. This was no hybrid. The angel had lived, grown, moved its wings and been of one substance.

It filled the back seat of the jeep. The general said, "I'll drive. . . . Lieutenant . . . sergeant, meet me at the field. . . . Raw, you get HQ again on a Z line and have them send a helicopter. Two extra passengers for the trip out, tell them. Have General Budford fly in now, if possible. Give no information except that these suggestions are from me."

"Yes, sir."

"Then black out all communications from this island."

"Yes, sir."

"If the Devoted Brethren Mission won't shut its radio off, see that it stops working."

The major nodded, waited a moment, and walked down the jungle track in haunted obedience.

"I'll drive it," the general repeated.

He felt long and carefully for a pulse. Nothing. The body was growing rigid. He started the jeep. Once he glanced back at his incredible companion. The face was perfectly serene; the lurching of the vehicle, for all his care in driving, had parted the lips.

He reached the shade at the edge of the playing field where the jeep had first been parked. He cut the motor. The school compound had been empty of persons when he passed this time. There had been no one on the road; not even any children. Presently the mission bell began to toll slowly. Reverend Simms, he thought, would be holding services. That probably explained the absence of people, the hush in the heat of midday, the jade quietude.

He pulled out a cigarette, hesitated to smoke it. He wondered if there were any further steps which he should take. For his own sake, he again carefully examined the angel, and he was certain afterward only that it was like nothing earthly, that it could be an angel and that it had died, without any external trace of the cause. Concussion, doubtless.

He went over his rationalizations. If men with wings like this

did exist on some small, remote planet; if any of them had visited Earth in rocket ships in antiquity, it would explain a great deal about what he had thitherto called "superstitious" beliefs. Fiery chariots, old prophets being taken to heaven by angels, and much else.

If the Russians had "made" it and dropped it to confuse the Free World, then it was all over; they were already too far ahead scientifically.

He lighted the cigarette. Deep in the banyans, behind the screens of thick, aerial roots and oval leaves, a twig snapped. His head swung fearfully. He half expected another form—winged, clothed in light—to step forth and demand the body of its fallen colleague.

A boy emerged—a boy of about nine, sun-tanned, big-eyed and muscular in the stringy way of boys. He wore only a T-shirt and shorts; both bore marks of his green progress through the jungle.

"You have it," he said. Not accusatively. Not even very emotionally. "Where's father?"

"Are you——"

"I'm Ted Simms." The brown gaze was suddenly excited. "And you're a general!"

The man nodded. "General Scott." He smiled. "You've seen"—he moved his head gently toward the rear seat—"my passenger before?"

"I saw him fall. I was there, getting Aunt Cora a bunch of flowers."

The general remained casual, in tone of voice. "Tell me about it."

"Can I sit in the jeep? I never rode in one yet."

"Sure."

The boy climbed in, looked intently at the angel, and sat beside the general. He sighed. "Sure is handsome, an angel," said the boy. "I was just up there at the spring, picking flowers, because Aunt Cora likes flowers quite a lot, and she was mad be-

cause I didn't do my arithmetic well. We had seen the old test shot, earlier, and we're sick and tired of them, anyhow! They scare the natives and make them go back to their old, heathen customs. Well, I heard this whizzing up in the air, and down it came, wings out, trying to fly, but only spiraling, sort of. Like a bird with an arrow through it. You've seen that kind of wobbly flying?"

"Yes."

"It came down. It stood there a second and then it sat."

"Sat?" The general's lips felt dry. He licked them. "Did it—see you?"

"See me? I was right beside it."

The boy hesitated and the general was on the dubious verge of prodding when the larklike voice continued, "It sat there crying for a while."

"Crying!"

"Of course. The H-bomb must of hurt it something awful. It was crying. You could hear it sobbing and trying to get its breath even before it touched the ground. It cried, and then it looked at me and it stopped crying and it smiled. It had a real wonderful smile when it smiled."

The boy paused. He had begun to look with fascination at the dashboard instruments.

"Then what?" the general murmured.

"Can I switch on the lights?" He responded eagerly to the nod and talked as he switched the lights, tried the horn. "Then not much. It smiled and I didn't know what to do. I never saw an angel before. Father says he knows people who have, though. So I said 'Hello,' and it said 'Hello,' and it said, after a minute or so, 'I was a little too late,' and tears got in its eyes again and it leaned back and kind of tucked in its wings and, after a while, it died."

"You mean the—angel—spoke to you—in English?"

"Don't they know all languages?" the boy asked, smiling.

"I couldn't say," the general replied. "I suppose they do."

He framed another question, and heard a sharp "Look out!" There was a thwack in the foliage. Feet ran. A man grunted. He threw himself in front of the boy.

Reverend Simms had crept from the banyan, carrying a shotgun, intent, undoubtedly, on preventing the removal of the unearthly being from his island. The lieutenant and sergeant, rounding a turn in the road, had seen him, thrown a stone to divert him, and rushed him. There was almost no scuffle.

The general jumped down from the jeep, took the gun, looked into the missionary's eyes and saw no sanity there—just fury and bafflement.

"You've had a terrible shock, dominie," he said, putting the gun in the front of the jeep. "We all have. But this is a thing for the whole world, if it's what you believe it to be. Not just for here and now and you. We shall have to take it away and ascertain—"

"Ye of little faith!" the missionary intoned.

The general pitied the man and suddenly envied him; it was comforting to be so sure about anything.

Comforting. But was such comfort valid or was it specious? He looked toward the jeep. Who could doubt now?

He could. It was his way of being—to doubt at first. It was also his duty, as he saw duty.

Rawson, looking old and deathly ill, came down the cart track in the green shadows. But he had regained something of his manner. "All set, Marc. No word will leave here. Plane's on the way; General Budford's flying in himself. Old Bloodshed said it better be Z priority." The major eyed the white, folded wings. "I judge he'll be satisfied."

General Scott grinned slightly. "Have a cigarette, Raw." He sat beside the praying missionary with some hope of trying to bring the man's mind from dread and ecstasy back to the human problems—the awesome, unpredictable human enigmas—which would be involved by this "casualty."

One thing was sure. The people who had felt for years that

man didn't yet know enough to experiment with the elemental forces of Nature were going to feel entirely justified when this story rocked the planet.

If, the general thought on with a sudden, icy feeling, it wasn't labeled Top Secret and concealed forever.

That could be. The possibility appalled him. He looked up angrily at the hot sky. No bomb effects were visible here; only the clouds' cyclorama toiling across the blue firmament. Plenty of Top Secrets up there still, he thought.

The President of the United States was awakened after a conference. When they told him, he reached for his dressing gown, started to get up and then sat on the edge of his bed. "Say that again."

They said it again.

The President's white hair was awry, his eyes had the sleep-hung look of a man in need of more rest. His brain, however, came wide awake.

"Let me have that in the right sequence. The Bugaboo test brought down, on Tempest Island, above Salandra Strait, an angel—or something that looked human and had wings, anyhow. Who's outside and who brought that over?"

His aide, Smith, said, "Weatherby, Colton and Dwane."

The Secretary of State. The chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff. The chairman of the Atomic Energy Commission.

"Sure of communications? Could be a terrific propaganda gag. The Reds could monkey with our wave lengths—" The President gestured, put on the dressing gown.

"Quadruple-checked. Budford talked on the scrambler. Also Marc Scott, who made the first investigation of the—er—casualty." Smith's peaceful, professorish face was composed, still, but his eyes were wrong.

"Good men."

"None better. Admiral Stanforth sent independent verification. Green, of AEC, reported in on Navy and Air Force channels.

Captain Wilmot, ranking Navy chaplain out there, swore it was a genuine angel. It must be—something, Mr. President! Something all right!"

"Where is it now?"

"On the way, naturally. Scott put it aboard a B-111. Due in here by three o'clock. Coffee waiting in the office."

"I'll go out, Clem. Get the rest of the Cabinet up and here. The rest of the JCS. Get Ames at CIA. This thing has got to stay absolutely restricted till we know more."

"Of course."

"Scott with it?"

"Budford." Smith smiled. "Ranked Scott. Some mission, hunh? An angel. Imagine!"

"All my life I've been a God-fearing man," the President replied. "But I can't imagine. We'll wait till it's here." He started toward the door where other men waited tensely. He paused. "Whatever it is, it's the end to—what has been, these last fifteen years. And that's a good thing." The President smiled.

It was, perhaps, the longest morning in the history of the capital. Arrangements had been made for the transportation of the cargo secretly but swiftly from the airfield to the White House. A select but celebrated group of men had been chosen to examine the cargo. They kept flying in to Washington and arriving in limousines all morning. But they did not know why they had been summoned. Reporters could not reach a single Cabinet member. No one available at State or the Pentagon, at AEC or CIA could give any information at all. So there were merely conjectures, which led to rumors:

Something had gone wrong with an H-bomb.

The President had been assassinated.

Russia had sent an ultimatum.

Hitler had reappeared.

Toward the end of that morning, a call came which the President took in person. About thirty men watched his face, and all of them became afraid.

When he hung up he said unsteadily, "Gentlemen, the B-111

flying it in is overdue at San Francisco and presumed down at sea. All agencies have commenced a search. I have asked, meantime, that those officers and scientists who saw, examined or had any contact with the—strange being be flown here immediately. Unless they find the plane and recover what it carried, that's all we can do."

"The whole business," Dwane said, after a long silence, "could be a hoax. If the entire work party engaged in Test Series Avalanche formed a conspiracy—"

"Why should they?" asked Weatherby.

"Because, Mr. Secretary," Dwane answered, "a good many people on this globe think mankind has carried this atomic-weapons business too far."

General Colton smiled. "I can see a few frightened men conspiring against the world and their own government, with some half-baked idealistic motive. But not a fleet and an army. Not, for that matter, Stanforth or Scott. Not Scott. Not a hoax."

"They'll report here tonight, gentlemen, in any case." The President walked to a window and looked out at the spring green of a lawn and the budding trees above. "We'll know then what they learned, at least. Luncheon?"

On the evening of the third day afterward, Marc Scott greeted the President formally in his office. At the President's suggestion they went out together, in the warm April twilight, to a low-walled terrace.

"The reason I asked you to come to the White House again," the President began, "was to talk to you entirely alone. I gathered, not from your words, but from your manner at recent meetings, general, that you had some feelings about this matter."

"Feelings, Mr. President?" He had feelings. But would the statesman understand or regard them as naïve, as childish?

The President chuckled and ran his fingers through his thick white hair in a hesitant way that suggested he was uncertain of himself. "I have a fearful decision to make." He sighed and was

silent for several seconds as he watched the toy silhouettes of three jet planes move across the lemon-yellow sky. "There are several courses I can take. I can order complete silence about the whole affair. Perhaps a hundred people know. If I put it on a Top Secret basis, rumors may creep out. But they could be scotched. The world would then be deprived of any real knowledge of your—angel.

"Next, I could take up the matter with the other heads of state. The friendly ones." He paused and then nodded his head unsurely. "Yes. Even the Russians. And the satellite governments. With heaven knows what useful effect! Finally, I could simply announce to the world that you and a handful of others found the body of what appears to have been an angel, and that it was irretrievably lost while being flown to Washington."

Since the President stopped with those words, Marc said, "Yes, sir."

"Three equally poor possibilities. If it was an angel—a divine messenger—and our test destroyed it, I have, I feel, no moral right whatever to keep the world from knowing. Irrespective of any consequences."

"The consequences!" Marc Scott murmured.

"You can imagine them!" The President uncrossed his legs, stretched, felt for a cigarette, took a light from the general. "Tremendous, incalculable, dangerous consequences! All truly and decently religious people would be given a tremendous surge of hope, along with an equal despair over the angel's death and the subsequent loss of the—body. Fanatics would literally go mad. The news could produce panic, civil unrest, bloodshed. And we have nothing to show. No proof. Nothing tangible. The enemy could use the whole story for propaganda in a thousand evil ways. Being atheistic, they would proclaim it an American madness—what you will. Even clergymen, among themselves, are utterly unagreed, when they are told the situation."

"I can imagine."

The President smiled a little and went on, "I called half a dozen leaders to Washington. Cardinal Thrace. Bishop Neuer-

mann. Father Bolder. Reverend Matthews. Every solitary man had a different reaction. When they became assured that I meant precisely what I said, they began a theological battle"—the President chuckled ruefully at the memory—"that went on until they left, and looked good for a thousand years. Whole denominations would split! Most of the clergy, however, agreed on one point: it was not an angel."

The general was startled. "Not an angel? Then, what—?"

"Because it died. Because it was killed or destroyed. Angels, general, are immortal. They are not human flesh and blood. No. I think you can say that, by and large, the churches would never assent to the idea that the being you saw was Gabriel or any other angel."

"I hadn't thought of that."

"I had," the President replied. "You are not, general, among the orthodox believers, I take it."

"No, Mr. President."

"So I judged. Well, let me get to my reason for asking you to confer privately with me. The churchmen debated hotly—to use the politest possible phrase—over the subject. But the scientists—whom I also consulted"—he drew a breath and swallowed, like a man whose memory of hard-controlled temper is still painful—"the scientists were at scandalous loggerheads. Two of them actually came to blows! I've heard every theory you can conceive of, and a lot I couldn't. Every idea from the one that you, general, and all the rest of you out in the Pacific, were victims of mass hypnosis and the whole thing's an illusion, to a hundred versions of the 'little men from outer space' angle. In the meeting day before yesterday, however, I noticed you were rather quiet and reserved about expressing any opinion. I've since looked up your record. It's magnificent." The President hesitated.

Marc said nothing.

"You're a brave, brilliant, level-headed, sensitive person, and a man's man. Your record makes a great deal too plain for you to deny out of modesty. You are an exceptional man. In short,

you're the very sort of person I'd pick to look into a mere report of an incident of that sort. So what I want—why I asked you here—is your impression. Your feelings. Your reactions at the time. Your reflections since. Your man-to-man, down-to-earth, open-hearted emotions about it all—and not more theory, whether theological or allegedly scientific! Do you see?"

The appeal was forceful. Marc felt as if he were all the members of some audiences the President had swayed—all of them in one person, one American citizen—now asked—now all but commanded—to bare his soul. He felt the great, inner power of the President and understood why the people of the nation had chosen him for office.

"I'll tell you," he answered quietly. "For what it's worth. I'm afraid that it is mighty little." He pondered a moment. "First, when I suddenly saw it, I was shocked. Not frightened, Mr. President—though the rest were. Just—startled. When I really looked at the—casualty, I thought, first of all, that it was beautiful. I thought it had, in its dead face, great intelligence and other qualities."

The President rested his hand on the uniformed knee. "That's it, man! The 'other qualities'! What were they?"

Marc exhaled unevenly. "This is risky. It's all—remembered impression. I thought it looked kind. Noble too. Almost, but not exactly, sweet. I thought it had tremendous courage. The kind that—well, I thought of it as roaring through space and danger and unimagined risks to get here. Daring H-bombs. And I thought, Mr. President, one more thing: I thought it had determination—as if there was a gigantic feel about it of—mission."

There was a long silence. Then the President said in a low voice, "That all, Marc?"

"Yes. Yes, sir."

"So I thought." He stood up suddenly, not a man of reflection and unresolved responsibility, but an executive with work ahead. "Mission! We don't know what it was. If only there was something tangible!" He held out his hand and gripped the general with great strength. "I needed that word to decide. We'll

wait. Keep it absolutely restricted. There might be another. The message to us, from them, whoever they are, might come in some different way or by more of these messengers! After all, I cannot represent them to the world—expose this incredible incident—without knowing what the mission was. But to know there was a mission——” He sighed and went on firmly, “When I finally get to bed tonight, I’ll sleep, Marc, as I haven’t slept since I took office!”

“It’s only my guess,” the general responded. “I haven’t any evidence to explain those feelings.”

“You’ve said enough for me! Thank you, general.” Then, to Marc Scott’s honor and embarrassment, the President drew himself straight, executed a salute, held it a moment, turned from the terrace and marched alone into the White House.

During the months-long, single day of Northern Siberia’s summertime, on a night that had no darkness, a fireball burst suddenly above the arctic rim. As it rose, it turned the tundra blood-red. For a radius of miles the permafrost was hammered down and a vast, charred basin was formed. In the adjacent polar seas ice melted. A mushroom cloud broke through the atmospheric layers with a speed and to a height that would have perplexed, if not horrified, the Free World’s nuclear physicists.

In due course, counters the world around would begin to click and the information would be whispered about that the Russians were ahead in the H-bomb field. That information would be thereupon restricted so that the American public would never learn the truth.

In Siberia the next morning awed Soviet technicians—and the most detached nuclear physicists have been awed, even stupefied, by their creations—measured the effects of their new bomb carefully: area of absolute incineration, area of absolute destruction by blast, putative scope of fire storm, radius of penetrative radiation, kinds and concentrations of radioactive fall-out, half-lives, dispersion of same, kilos of pressure per square centimeter. Then, on maps of the United States of America, these techni-

cians superimposed tinted circles of colored plastics, so that a glance would show exactly what such a bomb would destroy of Buffalo and environs, St. Paul, Seattle, Dallas, as well as New York, Chicago, Philadelphia, Los Angeles, and so on—the better targets. These maps, indicating the imaginary annihilation of millions, were identical with certain American maps, save for the fact that the latter bore such city names as Moscow, Leningrad, Stalingrad, Vladivostok, Ordzhonikidze, Dnepropetrovsk, and the like.

It was while the technicians were correlating their bomb data—and the sky over the test base was still lava—that coded word came in to the commanding officer of the base concerning a "casualty." The casualty had been found in dying condition by a peasant who had been ordered to evacuate his sod hut in that region weeks before. After the casualty, he had been summarily shot for disobedience.

The general went to the scene forthwith—and returned a silent, shaken man. Using communication channels intended only for war emergency, he got in touch with Moscow. The premier was not in his offices in the new, forty-six-story skyscraper; but his aides were persuaded to disturb him at one of his suburban villas. They were reluctant; he had retired to the country with Lamenula, the communist Italian actress.

The premier listened to the faint, agitated news from Siberia and said, "The garrison must be drunk."

"I assure you, comrade——"

"Put Vorshiv on."

Vorshiv said, uneasily, the same thing. Yes, he had seen it. . . . Yes, it had wings. . . . No, it could not be an enemy trick. . . . No, there were no interplanetary vehicles about; nothing on the radar in the nature of an unidentified flying object. . . . Certainly, they had been meticulous in the sky watch; this had been a new type of bomb, incorporating a new principle, and it would never have done to let an enemy reconnaissance plane observe the effects.

"I will come," said the premier.

He ordered a new Khalov-239 prepared for the flight. He was very angry. Lamenula had been coy—and the premier had enjoyed the novelty of that, until the call from Siberia had interrupted. Now he would have to make a long, uncomfortable journey in a jet—which always frightened him a little—and he would be obliged to postpone the furthering of his friendship with the talented, beautiful, honey-haired young Italian.

Night came to the Siberian flatlands and the sky clouded so that there was a semblance of darkness. A frigid wind swept from the Pole, freezing the vast area of mud created by the H-bomb. In the morning the premier came in at the base airfield, twelve jets streaming in the icy atmosphere, forward rockets blasting to brake the race of the great ship over the hard-packed terrain. It stopped only a few score rods short of the place where the "inadequate workers" lay buried—the more than ten thousand slaves who had died to make the field.

Curiously enough, it was an American jeep which took the premier out to the scrubby patch of firs. The angel lay untouched, but covered with a tarpaulin and prodigiously guarded round about by men and war machines.

"Take it off."

He stood a long time, simply looking, his silent generals and aides beside him.

Not a tall man, this Soviet premier, but broad, overweight, bearlike in fur clothing—a man with a Mongol face and eyes as dark, as inexpressive and unfeeling as prunes. A man whose face was always shiny, as if he exuded minutely a thin oil. A man highly educated by the standards of his land; a man ruthless by any standard in history.

What went through his head as he regarded the dazzling figure, he would not afterward have catalogued. Not in its entirety. He was afraid, of course. He was always afraid. But he had achieved that level of awareness which acknowledges, and uses, fear. In the angel he saw immediately a possible finish to the dreams of Engels, Marx, the rest. He saw a potential end of communism, and even of the human race. This milk-white cadaver,

this impossible reality, this beauty Praxiteles could never have achieved even symbolically, could mean—anything.

Aloud, he said—his first remark—“Michelangelo would have appreciated this.”

Some of the men around him, scared, breathing steam in the gray, purgatorial morning, smiled or chuckled at their chief's erudition and self-possession. Others agreed solemnly: Michelangelo—whatever he was or had been—would have appreciated this incredible carcass.

He then went up and kicked the foot of the angel with his own felted boot. It alarmed him to do so, but he felt, as premier, the duty. First, the noble comment; next, the boot.

He was aware of the fact that the men around him kept glancing from the frozen angel up toward the barely discernible gray clouds. They were wondering, of course, if it could be God-sent. Sounds came to him—bells of churches, litanies recited, chants—Gregorian music in Caucasian bass. To his nostrils came the smell of incense. He thought, as atheists must, what if they were right?

Against that thought he ranged another speedily enough; it was his custom. He wrenched the ears and eyes of his mind from the church pageantry of recollected boyhood, in the Czar's time, to other parts of his expanding domain. He made himself hear temple bells, watch sacred elephants parade, behold the imbecile sacrifices and rituals of the heathen. They, too, were believers, and they had no angels. Angels, he therefore reasoned, were myths.

It occurred to him—it had already been suggested to him by General Mornsk, of Intelligence—that some such being as this, come on a brief visit from an unknown small planet, had given rise to the whole notion of angels. He chuckled.

Vorshiv had the temerity to ask, “You have formed an opinion, comrade?”

The premier stared at the stringy, leathern man with his watery eyes and his record: eighteen million unworthy citizens

"subdued." "Certainly." He looked once more at the casualty. "Autopsy it. Then destroy the remains."

"No," a voice murmured.

The premier whirled about. "Who said that?"

It was a young man, the youngest general, one born after 1917, one who had seen no world but the Soviet. Now, pale with horror and shame, the young man said, "I merely thought, sir, to preserve this for study."

"I detected sentiment. Credulity. Superstition. Your protest was a whimper."

The young officer showed a further brief flicker of dissent. "Perhaps—this being cannot be destroyed by our means."

The premier nodded at the body, and his thin, long lips became longer, thinner. A smile, perhaps. "Is not our second test planned for the very near future?"

"Tomorrow," Mornsk said. "But we are prepared to postpone it if you think the situation—"

"Postpone it?" The premier smiled. "On the contrary. Follow plans. Autopsy this animal. Attach what remains to the bomb. That should destroy it effectively." He glanced icily at the young general, made a daub at a salute and tramped over the ice-crisped tundra toward the jeeps.

On the way back to the base, Mornsk, of Intelligence, decided to mention his theory. Mornsk turned in his front seat. "One thing, comrade. Our American information is not, as you know, what it was. However, we had word this spring of what the British call a 'flap.' Many sudden, very secret conferences. Rumors. We never were able to determine the cause—and the brief state of near-panic among the leadership has abated. Could it be—the 'flap' followed one of their tests—that they, too, had a 'casualty'?"

"It could be," the premier replied. "What of it?"

"Nothing. I merely would have thought, comrade, that they would have announced it to the world."

The thin lips drew thinner again. "They are afraid. They

would, today, keep secret a thousand things that, yesterday, they would have told one another freely. Freedom. Where is it now? We are driving it into limbo—their kind. To limbo." He shut his prune eyes, opened them, turned to the officer on his left. "Gromov, I hope the food's good here. I'm famished."

An old Russian proverb ran through his mind: "Where hangs the smoke of hate burns a fiercer fire called fear."

The trick, he reflected, was to keep that fire of fear alive, but to know at the same time it might consume you also. Then the trick was to make the fear invisible in the smokes of hatred. Having accomplished that, you would own men's souls and your power would be absolute, so long as you never allowed men to see how their hate was but fear, and so long as you, afraid, knowing it, hence more shrewd and cautious than the rest, did not become a corpse at the hands of the hating fearful.

There, in a nutshell, was the recipe for dictatorship. Over the proletariat. Over the godly believers. Over the heathen. Over all men, even those who imagined they were free and yet could be made to hate:

Frighten; then furnish the whipping boys. Then seize. Like governing children.

If more of these angels showed up, he reflected, it would simply be necessary to pretend they were demons, Lucifer, outer-space men bent on assassinating humanity. So simple.

The slate-hued buildings of the base rose over the tundra. From the frigid outdoors he entered rooms heated to a tropical temperature by the nearby reactors. There, too, the Soviets had somewhat surpassed the free peoples.

His secretary, Maximov, had thoughtfully forwarded Lamenula, to temper the hardships of the premier's Siberian hegira. He was amused, even somewhat stirred, to learn the young lady had objected to the trip, had fought, was even now in a state of alternate hysteria and coma—or simulated coma. A little communist discipline was evidently needed, and being applied; and he would take pleasure in administering the finishing touches.

Late that night he woke up with a feeling of uneasiness. A

feeling, he decided, of fear. The room was quiet, the guards were in place, nothing menaced him in the immediate moment, and Lamenula was asleep. Her bruises were beginning to show, but she had learned how to avoid them in the future, which was the use of bruises.

What frightened him was the angel. Church music, which he had remembered, but refused to listen to in his mind, now came back to him. It did not cause him to believe that the visitor had given a new validity to an Old Testament. It had already caused him to speculate that what he, and a billion others, had thitherto regarded as pure myth might actually be founded on scientific fact.

What therefore frightened the premier as he lay on the great bed in the huge, gaudily decorated bedchamber, was an intuition of ignorance. Neither he nor his physicists, he nor his political philosophers—nor any men in the world that still, ludicrously, blindly, referred to itself as “free”—really knew anything fundamental about the universe. Nobody really knew, and could demonstrate scientifically, the “why” of time and space and energy—or matter. The angel—the very beautiful angel that had lain on the cold tundra—might possibly mean and be something that not he nor any living man, skeptic or believer, could even comprehend.

That idea wakened him thoroughly. Here was a brand-new dimension of the unknown to be faced. He sat up, switched on the light and put a cigarette in his thin mouth.

How, he asked himself, could this fear of the unknown be translated into a hatred of something known, and so employed to enhance power? His power. That was, invariably, the formulation; once made, it generally supplied its own answer.

You could not, however, set the people in the Soviets and the people in the rest of the world to hating angels. Not when, especially, their reality—or real counterpart—could never be exhibited and had become a military secret.

Mornsk's theory bemused him. Had the Americans also shot one down with an H-bomb? If so, they'd followed a procedure

like his own, apparently. Saying nothing. Examining the victim, doubtless.

He realized he should go to sleep. He was to be roused early for the test of the next super-H-bomb, but he kept ruminating, as he smoked, on the people of the United States. *Whom*, he reflected, *we shall destroy in millions in*— The number of months and days remaining before the blitz of the U.S.A. was so immense a secret that he did not let himself reckon it exactly. *Whom we shall slaughter in sudden millions, soon.*

But suppose something intervened? Angels?

He smiled again. Even if such creatures had visited the earth once before, it was long ago. They might be here again now. They would presumably go away again, for millenniums. Ample time to plant the Red flag everywhere in the world.

Still, he could not know, and not to know was alarming.

There was a phone beside his bed. He could astound telephone operators halfway around the world, and yet, doubtless, in ten minutes, fifteen—perhaps an hour—he could converse with the President of the United States.

“Seen any angels, Mr. President? . . . What do you make of it? . . . Perhaps we aren’t as knowing as we imagine. . . . Possibly we should meet and talk things over—postpone any—plans we might have for the near future? At least, until this matter of invading angels is settled.”

It wouldn’t be that simple or that quick, but it might be done. And it might be that that was the only possible way to save the Soviet, because it might be the one way left to save man and his planet.

He thought about the abandonment of the communist philosophy, the scrapping of decades of horror and sacrifice, the relaxing of the steely discipline; he thought of the dreams of world domination gone glimmering—of “freedom” being equated with communism. There welled in him the avalanche of hatred which was his essence and the essence of his world. He ground out his cigarette and tried to sleep. . . .

In the morning, after the test shot—which was also very suc-

cessful and, the premier thought, frightening—he requested the report on the autopsy of the casualty. He had to ask repeatedly, since it became clear that none of the nearby persons—generals, commissars, aides, technicians—wanted to answer. He commanded Mornsk.

The general sweated in the cold air, under a sky again clear and as palely blue as a turquoise. “We have no report, comrade. The autopsy was undertaken last night by Smidz. An ideal man, we felt—the great biologist, who happened to be here, working on radiation effects on pigs. He labored alone all night, and then—your orders, comrade—the—remains were fixed to the bomb.” Mornsk’s glance at the towering mushroom disposed of that matter. “It was then discovered that Smidz made no notes of whatever he learned.”

“Get Smidz.”

“This morning early, comrade, he killed himself.”

General Scott did not return to the Pacific until nearly Christmastime. He had hoped not to go back at all, particularly since he had spent the autumn with his family in Baltimore, commuting weekdays to the Pentagon. In December, however, he received secret information of still another series of springtime nuclear-weapons tests and orders to fly again to the Sangre Islands, where he would prepare another of the group for total sacrifice. The death of islands was becoming commonplace to the weaponeers. In the unfinished span of his own military career, a suitable target had grown from a square of canvas stretched over a wooden frame to a building, and then to a city block, next a city’s heart, and now, an island the size of Manhattan. This, moreover, was not holed, wrecked or merely set afire, but wiped off the earth’s face, its roots burned away deep into the sea, its substance thrown, poisonous, across the skies.

He went reluctantly, but as a soldier must, aware that by now he had the broadest experience—among general officers—for the task at hand.

Work went ahead with no more than the usual quota of

"bugs"—or what his orderly would have called "snafus." It was a matter of "multiple snafu," however, which finally led the general to order a light plane to fly him to Tempest Island. There had arisen an argument with the natives about property rights; there was some trouble with the placement of instruments; a problem about electric power had come up; and a continuing report of bad chow was being turned in from the island mess hall. Time for a high-echelon look-see.

As he flew in, General Scott noticed the changes which he had helped to devise. The mission playing field had been bulldozed big enough to accommodate fair-sized cargo planes on two X-angled strips. Here and there the green rug of jungle had been macheted open to contain new measuring devices of the scientists. The harbor had been deepened; dredged-up coral made a mole against the purple Pacific as well as the foundation for a sizable pier. Otherwise, Tempest was the same.

His mind, naturally, returned to his previous trip and to what had been found on the island. The general had observed a growing tendency, even in Admiral Stanforth and Rawson, now a colonel, to recall the angel more as a figure of a dream than as reality. Just before the landing gear came down he looked for, and saw, the very glade in which the angel had fallen. Its clear spring was an emerald eye and the Bletias were in violet bloom all around.

Then he was on the ground, busy with other officers, busy with the plans and problems of a great nation, scared, arming, ready these days for war at the notice of a moment or at no notice whatever. Even here, thousands upon thousands of miles from the nervous target areas of civilization, the fear and the desperate urgency of man had rolled up, parting the jungle and erecting grim engines associated with ruin.

He was on his way to the headquarters tent when he noticed, and recognized, the young boy.

Teddy Simms, he thought, was about ten now, the age of his own son. But Teddy looked older than ten, and very sad.

The general stepped away from his accompanying officers.

"You go on," he said. "I'll soon catch up. This is an old friend of mine." He waved then. "Hi, Ted! Why you all dressed up? Remember me?"

The youngster stopped and did recognize the general, with a look of anxiousness. He nodded and glanced down at his clothes. "I'm gonna leave! Tonight. It'll be"—his face brightened slightly—"my very first airplane ride!"

"That's swell!" The general had been puzzled by signs of apprehension in the boy. "How's your father? And your aunt? Cora, wasn't it?"

"She's O.K. But father—" His lip shook.

Marc Scott no longer smiled. "Your father—"

The boy answered stonily, "Went nuts."

"After—" the general asked, knew the answer and was unsurprised by the boy's increased anxiousness.

"I'm not allowed to say. I'd go to prison forever."

A jeepful of soldiers passed. The general moved to the boy's side and said, "With me, you are, Ted. Because I know all about it too. I'm—I'm mighty sorry your father—is ill. Maybe he'll recover, though."

"The board doesn't think so. They're giving up the mission. That's why I'm going away. To school, Stateside. Father"—he fell in step with the general, leaping slightly with each stride—"father never got any better—after that old day you were here."

"What say, we go back where—it happened? I'd like to see it once more, Ted."

"No." Teddy amended it, "No, sir. I'm not even allowed to talk about it. I don't ever go there!"

"It's too bad. I thought it was the most beautiful thing that ever happened to me in my life."

The boy stared at the man incredulously. "You did? Father thought it was the worst thing ever happened."

"I felt as if you, Ted—and I—all of us—were seeing something completely wonderful!"

The boy's face showed an agreement which changed, slowly, to a pitiable emotion—regret, or fear, perhaps shame. It was the

general's intuition which bridged the moment: Teddy knew more than he had ever said about the angel; he had lied originally or omitted something.

"What is it, son?" The general's tone was fatherly. Eyes darted toward the jungle, back to the general and rested measurably, then hopelessly. It was as if the youngster had considered aloud running away and had decided his adversary was too powerful to evade.

He stood silent a moment longer; then said almost incoherently, "I never meant to keep it! But it is gold! And we were always so mighty poor! I thought, for a while, if father sold it — But he couldn't even think of things like selling gold books. He had lost his reason."

If the general's heart surged, if his mind was stunned, he did not show it. "Gold books?" His eyes forgave in advance.

"Just one book, but heavy." The dismal boy looked at the ground. "I didn't steal it, really! That angel—dropped it."

The general's effort was tremendous. Not in battle had composure cost him as dear. "You—read it?"

"Huh!" the boy said. "It was in all kinds of other languages. 'Wisdom,' that angel said it was. 'Gathered from our whole galaxy—for Earth.' Did you ever know—" His voice intensified with the question, as if by asking it he might divert attention from his guilt. "Did you know there are other people on other planets of other suns, all around? Maybe Vega, or the North Star, or Rigel, or more likely old Sirius? That angel mentioned a few names. I forget which."

"No. I didn't realize it. And, you say, this book had a message for the people on Earth, written in all languages? Not English, though?"

"I didn't see any English. I saw—like Japanese and Arabian—and a lot of kinds of alphabets you never heard of—some, just dots."

"And you—threw it away?" He asked it easily too.

"Naw. You couldn't do that! It's gold—at least, it looks like gold. All metal pages. It's got hinges, kind of, for every page. I

guess it's fireproof and even space-proof, at the least. I didn't throw it away. I hid it under an old rock. Come on. I'll show you."

They returned to the glade. The book lay beneath a flat stone. There had been another the general was never to know about—a book buried beneath a sod hut in Siberia by a peasant who also had intended to sell it, for he, too, had been poor. But the other book, identical, along with the hovel above it, had been reduced to fractions of its atoms by a certain test weapon which had destroyed the body of its bearer.

This one the general picked up with shaking hands, opened and gazed upon with an ashen face.

The hot sun of noon illumined the violet orchids around his tailored legs. The boy stood looking up at him, awaiting judgment, accustomed to harshness; and about them was the black and white filigree of tropical forest. With inexpressible amazement, Marc searched page after page of inscriptions in languages unknown, unsuspected until then. It became apparent that there was one message only, very short, said again and again and again, but he did not know what it was until, toward the last pages, he found the tongues of Earth.

A sound was made by the man as he read then—a sound that began with murmurous despair and ended, as comprehension entered his brain, with a note of exultation. For the message of icy space and flaring stars was this: "Love one another."

THE LOST HOUR

By PAUL GALLICO

EDWIN REITH-JONES, painfully shy and, as always, suffering from lack of self-confidence, sat by himself at the far end of the deserted Veranda Bar of the R. M. S. Gigantic, west-bound, and contemplated the electric ship's clock over the doorway, the hands of which had stopped at midnight. It had been some ten minutes since they had been in that position.

Clad in a dinner jacket with red carnation, the uniform aboard the Gigantic after six P.M., he regarded the stalled time-piece and the sign above it, which read **WESTBOUND ALL CLOCKS WILL BE STOPPED ONE HOUR AT MIDNIGHT**, through a haze in part compounded from Scotch whiskies he had consumed in his loneliness and in part from the fears and worrisome thoughts that dogged him.

They never should have sent him on this trip. He simply wasn't the man for it. Indeed, he remembered painfully the conversation overheard outside the chairman's door in the office before he was admitted:

“Reith-Jones? Good heavens, you can't! The man's an absolute rabbit when it comes to dealing with people! He'll never put it over!”

And the reply, "At least he's honest. It's wretched luck, but I don't see that there is any choice."

Nor had there been. A concatenation of circumstances, including an illness and an accident, made Edwin Reith-Jones, chief accountant for the Manchester cotton firm of Selwyn & Havas, the only responsible member available for the important mission of journeying westward aboard the *Gigantic* and contacting Sir Malcolm Gordien, the London financier.

Sir Malcolm was on his way to the United States to seek American aid for the cotton industry and to offer in return a kind of cartelization which, in the event of war, would mobilize British production with American. The small but growing firm of Selwyn & Havas wished to be a part of the scheme and share the aid. It was a job requiring the ability to meet and impress people as well as knowledge of the business.

Edwin's unobtrusiveness was so marked as to be almost obtrusive, for his hair was so fair as to be nearly white, as were his eyebrows. He was forty-five, but with his pale blue eyes, pink skin and plain, innocent features, he looked half that. Only a slight truculence about the chin seemed oddly out of harmony with his other, negative qualities. Sitting alone at the bar—most of the passengers having congregated for the dancing in the lounge—he gave the impression that he wasn't there.

His thoughts turned to Lisa Lisbon, the Hollywood film star. He had seen her descending from the Veranda Grill, trailing perfume, the rustle of expensive clothes and men behind her.

She would be in the lounge now, dancing with any one of the group of powerful and notable men rumored to be in love with her—Victor Vaughn Craig, the explorer and writer; Sen. Austin Gregg, of the Foreign Relations Committee; or the Earl of Morveigh.

And then in his mind's eye he himself held her in his arms and she was dancing with him. She was a wondrously beautiful woman with roan-colored hair, exquisite brown eyes and most delicately chiseled features. She was so beautiful it made the heart ache to regard her. He remembered that she was dressed

in a gown of copper sequins that exactly matched her hair. She was a more famous actress than even Greta Garbo had been.

He dismissed his dreams. As much chance of realizing them as bearding Sir Malcolm Gordien and persuading him to include Selwyn & Havas in his combine. He did not even know Sir Malcolm by sight. And furthermore, he could not dance—at least not any known intelligible step. He could sit, a nervous, socially timid, useless fellow, alone at a bar, absorbing Scotch whisky.

He said to the bartender, "May I have another or is it time?" referring to the British closing laws.

"Ain't no time at sea, sir," the bartender replied, setting up a new glass and pouring. Then, with a nod toward the halted clock, he added, "Ain't no time at all now. We're between time."

Was it the whisky or the words which had the most curious effect upon Edwin Reith-Jones? Surely not the former, for he held his liquor like a gentleman. No! The phrases ran through his mind and blood like fire. He felt suddenly different—strong, brave, gregarious, powerful. The barkeep had said it. Time was standing still.

Between Time! There was a difference of five hours between Great Britain and the United States. For an hour each night then, at midnight, they were adrift not only upon a trackless ocean but in a boundless universe where no time was kept.

Suddenly it came to him that with Time standing still, everything during that hour was unreal and taking place in a vacuum. Nothing really counted—not the Scotch he was downing, the glasses the bartender was polishing, the miles the ship's vibrating screws put behind her, nor words spoken, actions done, contracts signed, beliefs expressed.

Slipping thus in between Time, a man could escape at last from the straitjacket of his nature. During that nonexistent hour he could be anything, do anything, including—the idea came to him almost as an inspiration and a command—invite the most beautiful film star in the world to dance and proudly whirl her in his arms before the envious and admiring eyes of all. Forty-five minutes of the precious lost hour remained.

Inside Time, Edwin Reith-Jones discovered when he reached the lounge, was a peculiar clarity, a sharp awareness of people, of tensions, but particularly of himself and his own powers, that he had never experienced before.

Lisa Lisbon was not dancing. She sat, looking neither bored nor entertained, with Craig, a handsome giant; Senator Gregg, a gray-haired man with a beautifully sensitive face; and the lean, redheaded Earl of Morveigh. Nearby were two other suitors—Saul Wiener, president of American Pictures, and a pink-faced, boyish-looking man, playing canasta at a small side table.

There was yet another member of the group, a gaunt fellow with snapping dark eyes, high cheekbones and a long, humorous nose. He had big hands, which were at the end of arms too long for his sleeves. A man of forty-odd, with grizzled dark hair, brush-cut, he was smoking a black cigar and watching everything with amusement. This was Cy Hammer, Lisa Lisbon's agent.

There was another party adjacent that impressed itself upon Reith-Jones. It consisted of a typically well-to-do American family—a father and mother with two girls in the awkward thirteen-to-fifteen age bracket. But the girls were not sisters. On the contrary, they could not have been more different. The one was a wide-eyed, innocent-looking child, blond and breathless, who resembled her sweet-faced, well-mannered mother. The other, taller, pale, self-possessed, with Italian-cut black hair in the latest style, looked sophisticated and hard. Yet there was about her, Edwin felt, a curious yearning quality of desperation that did not seem to match her artificially brittle voice and laugh and the shocking fact that, though she was obviously still a leggy, undeveloped child, she wore lipstick, mascara and eye shadow and her fingernails were painted bright red. Although she was chattering animatedly, she never took her eyes off Lisa Lisbon.

Secure within the confines of the hour that did not exist, Edwin Reith-Jones marched up to the movie star, bowed and asked, "May I have the pleasure of this dance, Miss Lisbon?"

The group looked up in surprise at the intrusion, Saul Wiener pausing in the discard of a queen to remark, "So who is this guy?"

Victor Vaughn Craig's cold eyes appraised the newcomer. He said stiffly, "You must excuse Miss Lisbon. She does not care to dance."

In Time, Edwin would have blushed to death on the spot. Outside the clock's iron jurisdiction, he said evenly, "Why don't you let Miss Lisbon answer for herself?"

Lisa's rich, warm laughter rang out. "Why, it's the Boiled Turnip!" she cried, but with such immediate and engaging friendliness that Edwin could only take it as the dearest of compliments. "Oh, that's dreadful of me, but I always name everyone. Of course, I'll dance with you."

Craig said sharply, "Lisa!" and the Earl of Morveigh raised an eyebrow. But the star was looking across to Cy Hammer, who removed his cigar, winked at her and merely said, "Have fun, kid."

Lisa Lisbon arose and cast her magnificent glance over her assembled swains. "Why shouldn't I dance with him?" she inquired. "You boys have been boring the garter belt off me for the past hour."

Edwin was suddenly caught up in two nearby dark eyes staring into his for a moment, and felt that a message of deepest despair was being sent forth to him. But what it was, or why, he could not fathom. The eyes belonged to the strange, tall child with the make-up. Then Lisa Lisbon gave herself into his arms. The band was playing a fox trot.

At that moment the ship lurched, as it had been doing for some time, due to the fact that the *Gigantic* had passed Land's End and an angry following sea snapped at her from the Channel. She rolled all of the dancers, adept and tyro, including Edwin and Lisa Lisbon, the width of the dance floor, shrieking and laughing.

With a surprisingly deft movement, Edwin swung Lisa

around at the end of the slide, so that it was he and not she who crashed into a pillar.

"Nice going, Turnip," Miss Lisbon chuckled in her sweet, deep contralto. "Hang on, kid. Here we go again," as the reverse roll started them sailing back. They made two more trips before the band leader ended the set and Edwin brought a breathless Lisa Lisbon back to her party.

"Oo-oo-of!" she said. "Haven't had so much fun since I used to slide on the ice as a kid back in Milwaukee."

The men all arose stiffly to receive her, their faces trying to register disapproval of this odd albino Englishman who had crashed their midst.

"Thank you very much," Edwin said. Then he added, "I say, would you perhaps care for a turn up on the top deck with me, Miss Lisbon? It's jolly nice up there."

Victor Vaughn Craig loomed a menacing six feet four. He said, "Miss Lisbon would not care for a turn on deck. You've had your dance. Now how about making yourself scarce?" Implied was: "while you've got your health."

The Timeless Edwin Reith-Jones said succinctly, "Why don't you go soak your head, old boy?"

Cy Hammer was grinning like a gargoyle. Lisa's laugh temporarily postponed the crisis. "That's telling him, Turnip. . . . Victor, when I have my dialogue written for me, it will be by a script writer. . . . O.K., Turnip. We'll go topside and look at the moon. I think I like you."

She took Edwin's arm and marched out of the lounge with him, followed by the stares of some two hundred or so passengers and the adoring gaze of the queer, made-up child.

When she reappeared alone, the orchestra had packed up for the night and the entourage and most of the other passengers had gone from the lounge. Cy Hammer still remained there, waiting.

He stared in astonishment as the star came in. The immaculate axis of Lisa's gown no longer bisected her exactly. One false

eyelash was gone, her lipstick displaced and an appreciable amount of the magnificent roan-colored hair was disordered. Her cheeks were pink and there was a shining in her eyes.

Hammer regarded her quizzically and said, "A limey did this?"

Lisa fell into one of the overstuffed lounge chairs next to him. "Wow, what a man!" she said. "That was close. Two more minutes and it would have been all up with little Lisa." She felt the air with her fingers where the missing eyelash should have been, and then hastily stripped off the remaining one.

Hammer smoked tactfully for a moment, and then, since he was devoted to Lisa and her business and there were no secrets between them, he inquired, "What broke it up?"

Lisa replied, "I don't know," and then, "Yes I do. We were up forward. The ship's bell struck. He looked at his watch, said, like a bad actor, 'Great heavens, what have I done? Can you forgive me, Miss Lisbon?' and bolted before I could say a word."

She sat there a moment with a reminiscent and girlish smile about her mouth. Then she said, "The sweetness of him, the tenderness, the sweetness of the things he said to me. Nobody is ever sweet to me, Cy. He made me feel like a woman again, instead of like a doll or a prize animal."

The agent regarded her with astonishment. Then, without speaking, he reached over and patted her hand. Lisa turned her warm smile upon him. "Take me down to my cabin, Cy," she said. "I want to dream."

The tall, dark-haired child with the sophisticated make-up and manner was Melanie Holcombe, the unhappy shuttlecock of the notorious Chicago Holcombe divorce case of a decade ago. She was returning alone to her father in Chicago from Paris, where she had been living with her mother in the European whirl that meant Cannes in the winter, London in the season, autumn for the racing, St. Moritz for New Year's.

She had been befriended on the boat by the Chamberses and their daughter, Florrie. They had taken the unhappy child un-

der their wing, sat with her at the table, taken her to the movies and provided a kind of base for her.

All this, Edwin Reith-Jones had found out by accident, when he had gone to the purser's desk to make inquiries about Sir Malcolm Gordien, and, finding the chief purser in conversation with the ship's doctor, had been too shy to intrude.

"It's a rotten shame," the purser concluded. "The old girl's just taken a new lover—one of the de Neuilly boys. Melanie was in the way, so she's sent her packing back to her father."

The doctor asked, "Won't that be better for her? Girls usually love their fathers."

"True, but old Holcombe won't have any use for her. He's just married again—some young television actress. I saw pictures of them, taken at Sun Valley. She looks a real featherbrain. I feel sorry for the kid."

Reith-Jones felt sad and depressed. He knew now the reason for the unhappy expression in the girl's eyes. It was the same look of seeking and longing found in the eyes of a stray dog searching every passer-by for the one who will eventually take him home and give him love and shelter. He forgot about Sir Malcolm Gordien and went away. He wished somehow he might talk to the child.

That evening Edwin emerged from the moving-picture theater through the smoking room, which was crowded in anticipation of the big auction pool on the ship's run.

Lisa Lisbon, in blue-and-silver lamé, surrounded by her entourage, saw him pass and called to him, "Hi, Turnip! Come over here and sit with us!"

Crimson with embarrassment, he could do no more than go over as he had been bidden, and face the hostile or indifferent glances of the important people with her. It was Cy Hammer who made place for him and ordered him a double Scotch, which he downed quickly to give him courage, and another on top of that.

The ship was sorting itself out and Edwin was learning names and faces through listening. The pink-faced man engaged in the

eternal canasta game with Saul Wiener was Hamlin Mason, another suitor, head of National Motors, of Detroit. And the man a few tables away with the too-large head and perpetually sneering expression on his face was Frank Patch, the left-of-left British Socialist M.P., labor leader and good friend of the communists.

Edwin wanted to ask which one was Sir Malcolm Gordien, but did not wish to parade his ignorance before the others. He searched the room for one who might possibly be he, and felt the tension of expectation as the time for the bidding neared. The gambling lust already lay thick over the room, like the layers of blue smoke from the rich cigars. Syndicates and combines were forming to bid for the favored high numbers.

He watched the smoking-room steward searching for a volunteer auctioneer among the passengers. A famous comedian turned it down with "No, thanks. I'm on vacation." A well-known journalist took one look about him at the assembled money power and, with a quiet shudder, asked to be excused.

The steward finally went to his desk, rang a bell and pleaded, "Ladies and gentlemen, we know everyone is anxious for the auction to begin, but we have not yet been able to secure an auctioneer. Won't some gentleman kindly come forward?"

A buzzing hum followed as people at various tables urged others to go up and sacrifice themselves.

Edwin Reith-Jones' pale eyes found their way to the smoking-room clock, the hands of which were fixed at midnight. Time was suspended again. He rose to his feet.

Lisa Lisbon laid a quick, detaining hand upon his arm. "Turnip, sit down," she said. "They'll eat you alive."

But Edwin Reith-Jones, the famous wit, entertainer and auctioneer, walking confidently to the desk across a planet that had ceased to revolve through space, seized the gavel and said, "Ladies and gentlemen, and fellow cutthroats——"

In the gasp that followed, Victor Vaughn Craig said, "What an egregious little bounder."

But Lisa's anxious expression cleared as she breathed, "I think he's going to get away with it."

"There's one rule to this auction," Edwin was saying. "When the hammer falls, it's final. Any opening bid of less than fifty pounds from this aggregation of captains of industry, financiers, millionaires and plain, unassuming second-story men will be treated with the contempt it deserves."

There was a titter. Saul Wiener said, "What did he call us?" and then added, "What's with his face? I never saw a feller without any eyebrows like that before."

Lisa said, "He has them, only they don't show."

Cy grinned at her. "You find out everything, don't you, Snooks?"

The steward drew the first number from the bowl. Edwin went to work. He was fast, funny, accurate and hypnotic as he drew bids from all quarters of the room. The pool grew to record proportions.

Low Field came up. The sea was smooth, the big ship racing through the night. Nobody bid for it. Edwin cupped the number in his hands and then cradled it. "Poor little orphan," he said, "nobody wants him."

"Oh," cried Lisa, touched, "Cy, you buy it!" But Hammer's call of fifty pounds was immediately jumped and spirited bidding resulted, with Edwin finally knocking it down to him for two hundred and fifty pounds.

"What happened?" Hammer said. "He put the whammy on me. I need this number like a hole in the mind."

"That's my li'l' ol' Turnip," Lisa purred; and then soothed, "Never mind, Cy. Something may bust during the night and slow us down."

"And now, ladies and gentlemen," Edwin cried, "the number you have all been waiting for, Number Five Hundred and Seventy, the captain's choice." One number in the pool was always supposed to be the captain's estimate of what the run might be.

A prebattle hush fell over the throng in the smoking room

as Edwin's washed-out eyes wandered over them, weighing them. By now he knew all the big combines and syndicates, as well as the wealthy individuals, and for all he had mental names. The Wolves were on the starboard side, the Tigers to port, and the Hyenas dead center. Then there was Madame Vulture, Mr. Snake Eyes and Old Veins-in-the-Nose.

The Tigers opened the bidding at one hundred pounds, the Wolves raised it to two hundred, and the Hyenas said three hundred.

"Right," Edwin called cheerfully. "Now let's separate the men from the boys. Who'll say five hundred?"

Veins-in-the-Nose did. He was a florid, portly man with a great shock of white hair and possessive eyes. Madame Vulture raised it to five fifty; Snake Eyes said six hundred; and to the surprise of everyone, Victor Vaughn Craig bid six fifty. It was a fantastic sum, but the record amount in the pool made it a good gamble.

Too rich for their blood, the syndicates dropped out. Veins-in-the-Nose growled six seventy-five. Pale as a zombie, Madame Vulture, a Parisian *couturière*, whispered seven hundred. Craig took her off the hook with a call of seven twenty-five, drawing an admiring look from Lisa. Her big guy might not have a sense of humor, but he knew how to fight.

Edwin now had them in his net, and swept them along by twenty-fives, until to a hushed room he said, "Nine hundred and twenty-five pounds am I bid by Mr. Craig." He pointed his hammer at the florid gentleman. "It's against you, sir. Would you care to continue? I'll take ten pounds."

Veins-in-the-Nose stared heavily before him, but remained silent.

"Going, then, at nine hundred and twenty-five pounds . . . going—" Edwin brought the hammer down with a smart crack on the desk top.

"Nine thirty-five," said Veins-in-the-Nose.

"Sold to Mr. Victor Vaughn Craig at nine hundred and twenty-five pounds, and congratulations, sir!" Edwin called.

The florid gentleman was on his feet. "I said nine thirty-five, Mr. Auctioneer."

Edwin said, "I beg your pardon, sir, but you were too late. The hammer had fallen."

"Sir, I say the hammer had not fallen! My bid was in time! I demand that you accept it!"

At once the room was divided into two camps shouting, "Yes, yes!" or "No! Stick to your guns, auctioneer!"

Edwin declared firmly, "I repeat that your bid was too late. I stated the rules clearly at the beginning. The number goes to Mr. Craig, and that is final."

Lisa Lisbon breathed, "Oh, Turnip, Turnip, I love you," and Craig muttered, "The little guy's got guts," causing Lisa to remark, "Oh, hadn't you noticed that?"

But the old gentleman with the veins in his nose was shouting in uncontrolled temper now. "Sir, you are impertinent! I tell you my bid was in time and insist that the bidding be reopened! I guess you do not know who I am!"

A harassed-looking assistant purser arose. "Just a moment, Sir Malcolm. I'm sure this can be straightened out. . . . Mr. Auctioneer, in view of the strong protest made by Sir Malcolm Gordien, do you not think it might be advisable to reopen the——"

The name "Sir Malcolm Gordien" rattled about in Timeless space and bounced off the incorruptible hide of Edwin Reith-Jones, who interrupted with, "I think nothing of the kind."

There was laughter, which angered the purser, who said, "I am afraid, sir, I am going to have to ask you to alter your decision and reopen the——"

"You mean you are ordering me?" Edwin stared at him incredulously.

The assistant now likewise lost his head and temper. "As an officer of this ship, I am. Sir Malcolm is entitled to——"

Edwin laid down the gavel quietly. "Very well. You may damn well go to hell and run your auction under any rules you jolly well please. I'm through with it. My decision stands. You can do as you like. But you, Mr. Assistant Purser, are a toady,

while you, Sir Malcolm, are, in my opinion, a cheat and a bully. And now permit me to——”

He paused midway in this dramatic farewell. His eye had caught the smoking-room clock. The hands stood at eight minutes past twelve, and, as he watched, twitched to nine after. Time was on the move again.

He turned as white as his hair. His countenance seemed to be a void pierced only by two pale, terrified eyes.

“Oh, dear,” he murmured, “what have I done? What have I done?” He looked up at the clock again and once more repeated, “Oh, dear,” and Lisa Lisbon, her heart riven for him, expected at any moment he would add, “Oh, my fur and whiskers! I shall be late! What will the duchess say?” exactly like the White Rabbit in *Alice in Wonderland*.

Instead he put down the gavel and incontinently fled from the room up to the sun-deck railing, where he was sick. Then, limp and weak, he went to his cabin, thus missing the final act of the little drama in the smoking room.

The assistant purser, having taken over the gavel, said, “Mr. Craig, do you consent to the reopening of the bidding at nine hundred and twenty-five pounds?”

The big man said, “Your question comes a trifle late. However, I do.” There was a murmur of applause and approval.

Sir Malcolm cleared his throat. “Nine thirty-five.”

“Victor,” Lisa Lisbon said, “shut up. I have a hunch.”

Craig reflected a moment, studying the beautiful girl and liking the sincerity of the expression about her eyes. “Have you now, kitten?” he said softly. “That’s good enough for me.” To the purser he said, “Thank you. That will be all.”

The number was knocked down to Sir Malcolm Gordien for nine hundred thirty-five pounds, a little over twenty-six hundred dollars.

A little later a fourth engineer appeared at the door, whispered something to the smoking-room steward and went away.

The steward pounded the gavel once and said, “Ladies and

gentlemen, the engines will be stopped for a half hour or so at one o'clock for a minor adjustment. We are advising you so that you need feel no alarm when we lose way."

A rebel yell issued from Cy Hammer. Then he cried, "Lisa, you witch! You called it! I love you!" and he reached over and kissed her. The delay would drop the twenty-four-hour run covered by the pool well into the figures of the Low Field.

Lisa Lisbon had arrived at her eminence in her profession as well as her emergence as a woman through hard work, brains and the devotion and prescience of Cy Hammer. He had picked her a little over eleven years ago, when she had been an almost unknown M-G-M starlet, one of a dozen on the roster, used mostly for cheesecake and publicity stills. At that time, too, she had been crushed by the loss of her husband, Mark Lisbon, a script writer whom she had married when she was twenty. He had enlisted in the marines and was killed at Iwo Jima.

Hammer had penetrated the exterior of what seemed to be a brittle and unhappy girl to the talent beneath and had offered her work, self-sacrifice and stardom. Once she had accepted, she had never wavered, and they had formed an extraordinarily successful business partnership. Hammer had never made a mistake in choice of vehicles and directors in her slow, steady climb to the pinnacle. She had never let him down.

Theirs was an unusual relationship in that he was likewise the repository of all her thoughts and secrets. She kept nothing back from him and consulted him about everything, including her dressmaker, hairdresser and love affairs. When one broke up badly or she was hurt, she came to him and he was there to pick up the pieces. And because they were united in a business partnership, there was nothing that could not be discussed between them—no shock, no outrage and, above all, no censure. Each deeply respected the other as a grownup, with no personal ax to grind.

The next day, on her way to the lounge, Lisa encountered Sir

Malcolm Gordien in the main-deck passageway, and he acknowledged her presence with a slight bow, though they had not been formally introduced.

Walking alongside him, Lisa said, "You know, you were a rotten sport last night. You ought to be ashamed of yourself."

Sir Malcolm replied with icy indignation, "I did not ask you for your opinion, Miss Lisbon. You realize that you are being extraordinarily impertinent."

Lisa stopped and, perforce, Sir Malcolm had to do likewise. She turned the full shock of her beauty and smile upon the financier and looked him levelly in the eye. "When your face makes up the way mine does, Sir Malcolm, you can get away with it."

For a moment they dueled wordlessly and she triumphed, for she had reminded him that his success in making millions of pounds was no more than hers in enslaving as many people who flocked to see her pictures.

Sir Malcolm suddenly melted and laid aside the dignity which he had acquired overnight with his title. "I suppose you can," he said, smiling, "particularly with an old man."

"You know you didn't make your bid before the hammer fell."

"Of course I didn't. But the silly twerp irritated me."

"Don't you think you ought to apologize to the Turnip?"

"The who? Oh, the Reith-Jones fellow." Sir Malcolm looked at her with the sheepish air of the delinquent, and asked in the tone of voice used by a small boy ordered to do something unpleasant, "Must I?"

"Yes, you must."

"Very well, then. I will."

Lisa reached up, kissed one corner of his mustache, and for an instant leaned her velvet cheek against his. "Oh," she cried, "I like men!"

Sir Malcolm said, "I'll look him up. Come, let us drink a glass of champagne. I haven't felt so good in years." They continued on, arm in arm.

There were two further incidents that third evening, and both occurred during that hour when midnight stood still. In one of them, a mild and unobtrusive Englishman with pale eyes and albino hair, seemingly reading a book nearby, turned upon Frank Patch, smug, bitter Left-Wing Member of Parliament, who had been sounding off to a group within earshot of Senator Gregg, to the effect that Britain would no longer support American imperialistic warmongering policies.

Edwin Reith-Jones, secure once again, unhampered by Time or consequences, laid his book down sharply and said, "You are a liar, sir. You sit with the Socialists, but you speak for the communists. Englishmen will never abandon their friends or knuckle under to yours."

In the startled silence that followed this outburst, Sir Malcolm Gordien said, "Hear, hear! Well said, sir," and Senator Gregg looked up sharply and asked, "For whom do you speak?" This had been a voice he had not heard in recent days in Great Britain.

Edwin answered almost irritably, "For every Englishman who has a roof over his head and isn't a Nazi slave and doesn't wish to be a communist one. We are myriad." He turned upon Patch again and cried, "You are base and traitorous, sir! You belong to Russia and have the vicious ingratitude of the runny-nosed little boy who flings mud at his benefactor! You have no sense of brotherhood or honest blood in your veins! Brother answered brother and blood stood with blood in 1917 and 1941! You are no Englishman, sir, but a communist, and we will never support you!"

The incident ended when Patch, flushed and angry, arose and stalked out. History might have received an infinitesimal nudge. Sir Malcolm's plan might now fall upon slightly more receptive ears. But the second incident was perhaps the more important one, for a human soul was saved.

It began innocently enough with a good-night kiss. Nearby where Melanie Holcombe sat with her friends, Florrie Cham-

bers got up and said, "Good night, daddy. Good night, mother." She put her arms about her father's neck and kissed him, and then did the same with her mother.

Mrs. Chambers held her tightly as she said, "Good night, darling. Sleep well." For yet another moment the two lingered in embrace, gazing at each other with love and intimacy.

But Edwin Reith-Jones had been watching the expression in the eyes and on the painted face of the other girl. Only that day he had talked with her for an hour on deck, and gauged something of her loneliness. Now he experienced a thrill of horror.

Florrie said, "Coming, Melanie?"

"No." Florrie went. A minute later Melanie arose stiffly and said, "Good night, Mr. and Mrs. Chambers. Thank you very much for all your kindness," and walked away, but with ever-increasing pace, so that by the time she had reached the far door of the lounge, she was running, and Edwin Reith-Jones after her.

For, from those who have succeeded in escaping the confines of Time, there are no secrets, and to him, the expression on the face of Melanie during the simple, tender good-night scene had been that of one already dead.

Lisa Lisbon arose impulsively. Cy Hammer lazily stretched and put a hand on her arm. "What's up, Snooks?"

She said, "Let me go, Cy. I feel that something dreadful is about to happen. Didn't you see? He felt it too. . . . No. No. Let me go alone." The glances of all the men who were in love with her followed her to the door.

At the boat-deck starboard rail, Edwin reached Melanie in time. But she had one thin leg over and was poised to plunge into the roiling, black, phosphorescence-coated eternity below.

"No, no, Melanie!"

He pulled her back from the rail and sheltered her in his arms, where she collapsed, sobbing. He let her cry herself out; then commenced to talk to her in the darkness, quietly, soothingly, about herself and the life that animated her.

He said, "Listen to me, old girl. Look at yourself. Feel your

body. Hear the beating of your heart. This is a wonderful thing. You must not destroy it. You are alive to see, hear, think and know. Some people are born to be loved, others to give it. To give is good, too, Melanie. There are so many in this world who need it."

And he said further, "Melanie, you are old beyond your years and will understand. Do you wish to kill the body in which sleep the unborn children to whom you will be able to give the love that has been denied to you? Someday they will be awakened and will cry out and reach for you. And between you and them will pass just such a look as you saw tonight betwixt mother and daughter, because it will be yours to give."

And he said finally, "Have courage, youngster. Take care of this you which is so perfectly made, against the day when you will surely know the happiness of receiving as well as giving love."

Lisa moved out of the darkness. A ship's light fixed the tears on her cheek and made them shine like the jewels at her ears and throat. She said softly, "Melanie," and then, "Edwin. My dear, good Edwin."

At the masthead a bell chimed. Simultaneously all over the racing vessel electric impulse surged through the clocks again.

"Take her," Edwin said hoarsely, and gently shifted the child from his arms to those of Lisa. "Take her and keep her. Her father will make no objections. She worships you. You can make her into as fine a woman as you are. But first you must help her to be a child again. Let her stay with you."

He was gone. Lisa remained with her arms about the girl, her cheek resting on the small head with the too glossy hair.

"You may come with me if you like, Melanie," Lisa said to the child, who was crying softly again. Then, gently, with her handkerchief, she wiped the ravages of the mascara from the cheeks of the too-soon woman who was to have her girlhood restored to her.

It was the following night, troubled, that Lisa searched the ship for Edwin. Half of that hour during which the moving fin-

ger wrote not was gone by the time she found him standing at the stern rail below the Veranda Grill, looking out across the white wake and into the stars, dreaming she could not guess what dreams, except that they were bounded neither by Space nor Time.

She stood beside him, taking his arm and leaning against his shoulder in silence. She said, "It's the enchanted hour, isn't it, Turnip?"

He looked at her. "You know?"

"I guessed. It wasn't difficult. This is that hour between Time when one may be wise and brave and all-knowing. I came to you because I need help, Edwin."

"Yes, Lisa."

"Whom shall I marry?" He did not reply at once and she continued: "I want to marry again. I am living a lonely, selfish life." She counted her suitors off on her fingers: "Shall I be Mrs. Victor Vaughn Craig, keeper of a literary lion; or Mrs. Saul Wiener, queen of Hollywood; or Mrs. Hamlin Mason, ruler of motor society; the Countess of Morveigh, with a castle; or Mrs. Austin Gregg? Gregg is being talked of for the presidency."

"Which one do you love?"

"In each one there is something that I can love and respect."

"Who will make you happy?"

Lisa reflected. "I despair of that. Besides, that wasn't what I asked."

Edwin, staring out after the broad white track their ship painted on the dark surface of the ocean, replied, "Take the one who is kind. Kindness outlasts everything else."

Lisa nodded gravely and remained lost in thought.

Edwin turned to her and for a moment seemed to look her through and through.

"Lisa."

"Edwin."

And thus they remained, recognizing, knowing and loving each other. They loved beyond words, beyond even the taking

of each other, for in the sharing of this magic hour they were for one shattering moment too deeply moved by what they experienced.

Here was that perfection of which each had dreamed and sought at some time through life; that understanding, tenderness and unawakened passion, that blending of heaven and earth that men and women look for in each other and so rarely find.

At that instant they were one. They could have lived together into all eternity; they could have died together with equal happiness. They did not even kiss, but remained lost in each other, enveloped in such sweetness as neither had ever dared to hope for in mortal life.

And yet both knew in that moment that they were also lost to each other, for it was the enchanted hour, and as unreal and illusory as a dream. But, unlike a dream, neither of them would ever forget what they had seen in each other and what they had felt, the heights of human affection they had scaled in that moment of halted Time they had shared, the exquisite surge of love that filled their eyes with tears and their hearts with pain.

With the striking of the ship's bell reality would return.

Lisa said gently, "You're married, aren't you, Edwin?"

"Yes. For twenty years."

"Happily? Is she kind to you?"

"No."

"Why not, Edwin?"

"It is my fault. I never had confidence in myself. When I married her she was sweet and lovely. I didn't turn out the way she hoped. I'm nothing more than a clerk. It made her bitter."

"And is there no escape?"

"No. She needs me. I am that cherished daily reminder to her of her wasted life. I am all she has."

Lisa said, "Not to believe in oneself is a sin. We are punished for our sins."

Edwin replied, "Yes, I know," and looked at her again, but

differently, for this was their final parting, his acknowledgment of the weakness that would forever send them different ways—two who had so nearly gained paradise.

He glanced at his watch. "Lisa," he said, "there is one minute left!" He put his hands on her arms, holding her away from him, looking into her eyes. "Close your mind and open your heart."

For the first time she appeared confused and unable to meet his glance. She asked, "What do you mean, Edwin?"

He held her for an instant longer to emphasize his words. "Look close to home, Lisa!" Then he let her go.

From for'ard, borne on the wind of the ship's thrust, came the sound of the striking of the bell. Lisa shuddered quietly, turned and walked away into the darkness.

For the fifth and last time on that strange voyage, the motionless hands of the clock marked the enchanted hour. Lisa Lisbon and Cy Hammer stood at the rail beneath the Veranda Grill, from which came the gleam of pink table lamps and the sound of music.

They were in the shadows, almost where she and Edwin had stood the night before. The deck beneath their feet was shuddering with the turning of the twin screws as the giant vessel raced through the night to keep her rendezvous with the tide in the early morning in New York.

Lisa was silent, for she was thinking that there were many kinds of enchantment, if one believed in them, but only one from which there was no escape in the end, no matter what the hour. And yet, in a sense, this queer, magic Timelessness that the shy little Englishman had evoked helped now to give her the courage to face what must be faced with this man at her side, and which might spell an end to all enchantment forevermore.

Hammer, who had been looking out at the wake as Edwin had the previous night, turned to her with his friendly, quizzical glance and asked, "What's the matter, Snooks? That little Britisher get under your skin?"

For the first time, Lisa wished to deny it, but she could not. One spoke only the truth when all clocks stood still. She replied, "Yes, in a way he did—unforgettably."

Hammer nodded. "It's funny where you find it, isn't it? I think perhaps he was the best of them all. But it won't work, will it?"

"No," Lisa replied.

"Badly hurt this time, kid?"

"No," Lisa replied again.

Hammer said, "That's good," without surprise, and Lisa was aware that he was not curious as to why, or when, or what had happened, but was only expressing deep relief that she was not in trouble.

Beneath their feet the deck quivered. All about her, non-Time quivered too. This had been Edwin's gift to her.

"Cy," she said, in a voice so filled with timidity that she hardly recognized it as her own, "will you answer me a question truthfully?"

"Sure, Snooks. What's on your mind?"

"How long have you been in love with me?"

Hammer glanced at his watch, and Lisa's heart seemed to stand still. What if he replied, "And what makes you think I am?"

The gesture with the watch reminded her of that of the Englishman twenty-four hours ago. And she thought how much like him Hammer was in kindness, gentleness, goodness and steadfastness. How quickly he had understood and approved of her decision to take the miserable, difficult, abandoned girl, Melanie, to live with her. And yet she now knew there was something further that Hammer had. He was strong. When the ship's bell chimed, he would still be there. He would always be there.

Hammer had finished his calculations. He replied quietly, "Eleven years, seven months, two weeks, three days, fifty-eight minutes and eighteen—no, sorry, nineteen—seconds, twenty now."

"Why didn't I ever know? How could I have been so blind?"

Hammer's warm, slow smile spread over his face, crinkling his eyes, which were full of tenderness. "Agents aren't supposed to have hearts."

"Or actresses either, if it comes to that," Lisa said almost bitterly in self-reproach. Then, "Cy, will you marry me?"

"If you ask me prettily," he replied lightly, but she saw that he was deeply moved, as indeed she was at having found her love at last, and with a sense of home-coming.

She leaned her forehead against his shoulder to press and feel the dear, comforting boniness of it. The ship's bell struck the end of the enchanted hour.

"Please marry me, Cy," Lisa Lisbon asked humbly. "I have been in love with you for a long time, I know now. Everything else is and was an illusion."

He took her hand in his and held it firmly and tightly clasped, and they remained standing there for a long time, shoulder to shoulder, looking out over the star-illuminated waters and thinking of the joy and comfort they would bring to each other in the days to come.

Lisa Lisbon and Edwin Reith-Jones encountered each other for the last time on the crowded, noisy pier the following morning. Lisa and Hammer had been eased through customs quickly, and they had collected Melanie. There had been no one at the pier to meet the child, though there was a telegram instructing her to proceed to Chicago. They were on their way out when Lisa saw the Englishman. He was standing, with his sparse luggage, by a window, gazing out forlornly over the midtown skyscrapers.

She pressed Hammer's arm, and then went over to Edwin, and it was characteristic of Hammer that he only nodded understandingly and then went on with Melanie to await her at the exit.

Lisa said, "Good-by, Turnip."

Edwin blushed crimson, reached for his hat, found he was not wearing it, and finally managed to take the hand she extended. "Good-by, Miss Lisbon—Lisa."

She said, "You're unhappy. You shouldn't be. You've got Sir Malcolm Gordien eating out of your hand."

He replied bleakly, "It was expected of me. It's what I was sent for."

Lisa continued, "You saved a life and a soul; you've spoken up for your country before important people and done it a service; you have helped me to find a happiness that might have passed me by. Cy Hammer and I are going to be married."

"Oh, splendid!" Edwin said, and then repeated, "Splendid." Yet the bleakness did not leave his countenance, and beneath Lisa's questioning gaze he said finally, "What will happen to me? I've stolen five hours and done things in them I've never done before."

"What did you do with the final hour?" Lisa asked.

"I prayed," Edwin Reith-Jones replied, and the girl nodded almost as though this was what she had expected him to say.

She said, "It is true. You lived between Time on five borrowed hours. You will have to give them back."

"Yes, but how?"

Lisa smiled. "On the return journey. They'll be taken from you again, willy-nilly. There's never anything for free. You pay or give back."

"But what will I be like afterwards?"

"The same good, sweet, gallant, greathearted gentleman you have always been. But you will probably never make love to another girl or beard another lion."

"And is that all that will remain?"

"No," Lisa said gently. "There will be dear and tender memories. This is all we ever really steal from Time. God bless you, Edwin."

She reached over and kissed him; then turned and walked away to where Cy Hammer, Melanie and reality were waiting for her.

Edwin Reith-Jones remained standing there and watched her go, but the expression in his pale eyes and on his unobtrusive countenance was no longer either bleak or forlorn.